



# *His Nameless Love*

## *PORTRAITS OF RUSSIAN WRITERS*

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*PROGRESS PUBLISHERS*

*MOSCOW*

Translated from the Russian  
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БЕЗЫМЕННАЯ ЛЮБОВЬ  
ПОВЕСТИ О ЖИЗНИ РУССКИХ ПИСАТЕЛЕЙ  
на английском языке

© Translation into English. Progress Publishers 1974

*First printing 1974*

*Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*

Б  $\frac{70500-1149}{014(01)-77}$  - без объявления

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## YURI TYNANOV

"My belief is that the difference between fiction and history is not that the former is 'invented' but rather that it brings us a deeper and more subtle understanding of people and events, through its closer, more intense preoccupation with them. A writer can never invent anything more beautiful and powerful than the truth," said Yuri Tynyanov (1894–1943), a scholar and writer who combined in his work meticulous historical research and sensitive psychological analysis.

Three of Tynyanov's best-known works are his historical novels *Küchlya* (1925) about the Decembrist poet Wilhelm Küchelbecker, *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar* (1927–1928) about Alexander Griboyedov, a diplomat and the author of the famous comedy *Wit Works Woe*, and *Pushkin* (1935–1943), which the writer did not live to finish. From Tynyanov's pen also stem the historical stories *Sublieutenant Kizhe*, *Wax Personage* and a number of film scripts.

Tynyanov possessed a rare sense of history. When available material was insufficient to provide a full picture, he could make use of the most insignificant data, what one might term the shadows of an action, thought or feeling, to capture what was of major, fundamental importance and build up his narrative upon them.

One such "shadow" in the history of literature was Pushkin's "nameless love", a love for a woman whose name he never disclosed, which lasted throughout his life and exerted a profound influence on it.

Many a scholar attempted to fathom out the name of the woman Pushkin loved so hopelessly for so long. Princess Golitsina, Maria Rayevskaya and others were mentioned. Tynyanov, after a thorough study of Pushkin's elegies of the Lyceum period, came to the conclusion that the woman in question was Ekaterina Karamzina, the wife of the famous historian Nikolai Karamzin. He also put forward the hypothesis that it was to Ekaterina Karamzina that the dedication of the poem *Poltava* was addressed and that *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* was also connected with memories of her and the story she had told Pushkin. If we accept this explanation, the fact that an hour before his death Pushkin asked to see Ekaterina Karamzina falls into place. This literary exploration bore fruit in the shape of the story included in this volume about the "hidden" love that Pushkin cherished from schooldays to his deathbed.

Александр Пушкин



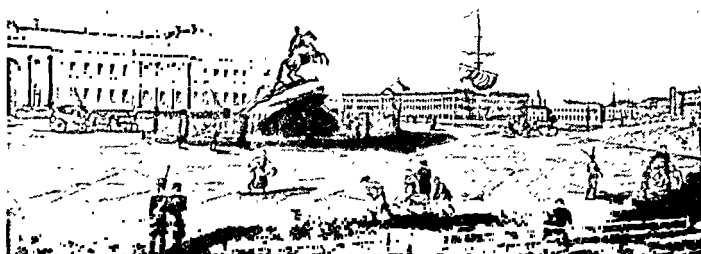
Alexander Pushkin. Oil painting by V. Tropinin. 1827



Natalia Goncharova. Water-colour by K. Br.



Yekaterina Karamzina. Oil painting by Damon. 1805



Senate Square in St. Petersburg. Water-colour by Paperson  
1800



Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum. Drawing by A. Pushkin. 1831





## *HIS NAMELESS LOVE*

### *1*

In Pushkin's life there was one particular love unusual in its power and constancy, which was to influence him throughout his life, although its object was "hidden" and never named. Traces of it were first noted by Mikhail Gershenzon when engaged in an analysis of Pushkin's elegies.

Pushkin's elegies written shortly after he left the Lyceum are an example of spontaneous poetic realism, and in this respect their significance for Pushkin's writing as a whole and their factual basis are incontestable. The pinpointing of external facts and circumstances, and, above all, emotional associations is so precise and the poetry is so concrete and free of generalities that it is possible confidently to assume that the circumstances and people referred to in the elegies are concrete ones taken from real life.

Here Pushkin found direct poetic means for expressing actual, immediate reality.

In Pushkin's writing these elegies, together with his epistles were a genre that no longer conflicted with the major tasks and genres of literature, the epos and drama, as had been the case in the poetry of the period immediately prior to the one under consideration, when elegies portraying stereotyped feelings and conventional heroines reduced the genre to one of trivialities. For Pushkin, on the other hand, lyric poetry was a means of mastering reality in its concrete forms and was the first and most important step towards the epos and drama. This is why the factual, biographical background to Pushkin's lyric verse is so important to the study of his poetry.

In his analysis of Pushkin's elegies Gershenzon picked out a whole cycle of poems which in one way or another depicted the poet's "Northern love", i.e., which must have occurred prior to 1820 when he was banished to the South, where memories of this love were to haunt him during the years of his exile.

By comparing various passages Gershenzon arrived at the conclusion that the heroine of these elegies whose name is never mentioned must have been Princess Maria Golitsina.

The controversy on this subject which immediately flared up between Shchegolev and Gershenzon brought out various comic aspects of research into Pushkin's work: controversy on this point of biography which by its very nature demanded a definite degree of restraint was soon coloured by invective.

This factor notwithstanding, Shchegolev succeeded in proving most convincingly that the one poem included by Gershenzon among those depicting the "hidden love", which was known to refer to Princess Golitsina, actually had no connection either with the other elegies or the "hidden love".

Thus Princess Golitsina was clearly not the woman who inspired Pushkin's deepest and most lasting love, whose name for some reason he had "hidden" from everyone.

Shchegolev himself, after thoroughly scrutinising the relevant manuscripts and following up various lines of thought, came to the conclusion that the object of this love, whose identity Pushkin succeeded in concealing from the outside world till the end of his life, was fifteen-year-old Maria Rayevskaya (1805—1863) later to become famous as the wife of the Decembrist Sergei Volkonsky.

Both literary historians completely ignored the most important question of all, namely why Pushkin should have gone to such lengths and taken so much trouble to hide his love for either the social celebrity and singer Maria Golitsina, friend of the poet Kozlov and Chateaubriand who spent most of her time abroad, or the young adolescent of a girl, Maria Rayevskaya, sister of Nikolai Rayevsky who had been a friend of the poet's since 1816, and Alexander Rayevsky who became a close friend of his in 1820.

This point neither of the biographers so much as touched upon.

## 2

For a start it should be pointed out that references to a "hidden love" are to be found not only in Pushkin's elegies and longer poems singled out by Gershenzon and Shchegolev which date from 1820 or later.

Pushkin himself intimated that he was concealing and indeed obliged to conceal from everyone some hopeless love

long before he wrote the cycle of elegies or the elegiac digressions in his poems singled out by the two biographers.

This first reference is to be found in an elegy dating back to the Lyceum period, to the year 1816.

In view of its significance and the fact that until now no elucidation of its subject matter has been provided at all, I cite it in full:

### ELEGY

Happy is he who undismayed  
 Can to himself his love acknowledge.  
 Who in a future yet unmade  
 Can nurse some hope, however modest,  
 For whom the ardent moon, maybe,  
 Will some night through the mists come peeping,  
 Whose trusty key may silently  
 Admit him where his love lies sleeping. ♂  
 But as for me, no clandestine  
 Delights relieve my melancholy.  
 The bloom of life must wilt and pine  
 When early-budding hopes prove folly!  
 And sadly youth will fly away,  
 Soon I shall hear old age's threat.  
 But, though forgot by love today,  
 My lover's tears I'll not forget! \* }-

This was still a far cry from poetic realism. The portrayal of happy love contains all the *habitual* poetic epithets and stylistic devices that feature in his lyrical poetry written at the Lyceum: "ardent moon", "trusty key", etc. Yet the love bereft of happiness which gave birth to the poem is remarkable for its realistic, clear, even incisive features, that are concrete instead of stereotyped already in the first verse:

Happy is he who undismayed  
 Can to himself his love acknowledge  
 Who in the future yet unmade  
 Can nurse some hope, however modest.

Nor should we overlook the last line referring to tears, tears born of his love.

This hopeless passion which the poet himself cannot acknowledge *undismayed* is attributed by all commentators to

\* Translations of poetry, unless otherwise stated, are by Avril Pyman.—Ed.

the "literary" heroine of the Lyceum elegies Ekaterina Bakunina out of pure inertia, since neither Pushkin's relationship with her nor even acquaintance is borne out with any certainty by reliable sources.

It did not seem to have occurred to anyone that Pushkin might have acknowledged his passion for the young and beautiful lady-in-waiting at Tsarskoye Selo, sister of his fellow-student without the slightest dismay: what is more if not a passion for her, at least superficial half-imagined infatuation with her had been openly acknowledged some time before not only by Pushkin but at the same time by two of his friends as well, namely Pushchin and Illichevsky, for Pushchin refers to young Ekaterina in his notes, and Pushkin himself, in 1825, in variants of his poem, *October 19th*. This passing youthful infatuation, whose *raison d'être* seems to have been to provide material for the elegies of that period was of such negligible depth that for the rest of his life he never once showed any interest in their heroine or what befell her subsequently. We know very little of her. The "hermits" at Tsarskoye Selo made a great deal of every female figure that appeared on their horizon and the figure of Ekaterina Bakunina can confidently be said to have flitted past Pushkin leaving no trace.

But what passion might the Pushkin of the Lyceum period be unable to acknowledge to himself undismayed? Which tears might he have been unable to forget? There *was* a love of this nature, and Pushkin did indeed have serious reasons for hiding it.

On May 25, 1816, Karamzin and his wife came to Tsarskoye Selo. Pushkin visited them at the first opportunity and started to pay the most frequent, almost daily visits. This—as it emerges with more than ample justification—"hidden love" was the wife of Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, the leading literary authority for Pushkin in his youth, Ekaterina Andreyevna Karamzina. Little is known of this love, which Pushkin himself strove to hide, yet there is something.

In reminiscences of Pushkin noted down from his friends by Pyotr Bartenev we find the following passage: "The late Ekaterina Protasova (Vocykova's mother) related (according to N.A. Elagin) how Pushkin suddenly took it into his head to flirt with Karamzin's wife. He even wrote her a billet doux. Ekaterina Andreyevna of course showed it to her husband. Both of them burst out laughing and after summoning Pushkin started admonishing him in serious tones. All this was so amusing and provided Pushkin with such a convenient opportu-

nity for a closer acquaintance with the Karamzins that since then they have become very fond of him and were soon on close terms." This incident should of course be stripped of sentimental trimmings peculiar to an old story of a mischievous prank embroidered by the old lady (Protasova). It should be noted though that Pushkin and his note were made the object of ridicule.

Another story noted by Bartenev sheds a quite different light on the incident. "The late Count Bludov told us that Karamzin had shown him the spot in his study that had once been watered with Pushkin's tears. The dressing-down from Karamzin might have been the result of some mere coincidence: tradition has it that a billet doux of Pushkin's sent to arrange a meeting with a certain lady fell by mistake into the hands of Ekaterina Karamzina (at that time still a beauty)."

Elsewhere Bartenev refers to the incident a second time: "The late Count Bludov liked to recall how Karamzin had pointed out to him the spot in the Chinese house at Tsarskoye Selo where Pushkin's tears had been shed."

This recurring incident is interesting in so far as it is related by Count Bludov, a prominent courtier who had nothing in common with Pushkin and who had reason to be hostile towards him and thus remember the spot where "Pushkin's tears had been shed".

For the moment we shall not dwell on the probability of Bartenev's story of the letter failing to reach the correct address: it was more probable than might appear at first glance. A name can be found even of the lady, to whom the note might have been addressed; it was probably the "young widow" referred to in one of his Epistles, a relative of Engelhardt, the director of the Lyceum. Of interest for our present purposes is something else though. Pushkin's tears described by Karamzin, the tears of which Pushkin wrote in the elegy were the realistic feature of the story, which changes the style and ring of this trivial anecdote as related by Protasova.

Troubled waters in the relations between Pushkin and Karamzin are well known, and likewise the quarrel between them.

The subject of relations between Pushkin and Karamzin requires particularly careful scrutiny. The outstanding literary reputation of the leader of the older generation did not in any way blind Pushkin to his role as mouthpiece of reaction. The years 1816-17, when the young poet was under the influence of the free-thinking atmosphere that reigned at the Lyceum and of

his new friends, Chaadaev\* and hussars who took part in the war of 1812, saw the beginnings of Pushkin's criticism of the ideological foundation of Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*\*\* that was soon to inspire Pushkin's celebrated epigrams.

By the end of Pushkin's Lyceum period, at a time when he maintained regular personal contacts with Karamzin, he became increasingly aware that Karamzin's role as enlightened advisor to the Tsar had been reduced to naught (in actual fact Alexander I rarely granted him an audience).

It should be noted that Pushkin's relations with Karamzin became increasingly cold and estranged as time went on.

The incompatibility of Karamzin's and Pushkin's literary tastes in the 1820s can be deduced, for example, from his assessment of Pushkin's poem *Gypsies* in a letter he wrote to Vyazemsky on December 2, 1824: "Yesterday young Pushkin junior (Lev Sergeyevich— Y.T.) recited his brother's *gypsy* poem and an excerpt from *Onegin*; it was lively, witty but not really mature. But to move on from Pushkin to Byron: his *Don Juan* I almost dropped in horror. What an abomination! It abounds in foolishness!"

Of course the differences between the two men ran very deep.

Yet this does not exclude the possibility of differences on a more personal plane. Despite these strained relations Karamzin played a most active part in alleviating the fate that awaited Pushkin, when, in 1820, the threat of exile to Siberia or the Solovetsky Islands hung over him. There is no doubt that the part Karamzin played in lightening Pushkin's sentence can be attributed precisely to the influence of his wife Ekaterina. So we come to an episode of strictly personal drama.

May it be noted in passing that Bludov's recollection to the

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\* *Chaadaev Pyotr Yakovlevich* (1794-1856)—author of the famous *Philosophical Letters* containing incisive criticism of the social order in Russia. Chaadaev had taken part in the Patriotic War of 1812 and maintained close ties with the Decembrist secret society.—Ed.

\*\* *History of the Russian State* by Nikolai Karamzin upheld the unshakeable strength of the autocracy, to which Russia supposedly owed its progress. Karamzin's conservative and monarchist views gave rise to fierce controversy. However, any open attack against Karamzin in print was virtually impossible at a time when he enjoyed the highest official favour. Pushkin succeeded in expressing his objections in a veiled form in his *Excerpts from Letters, Thoughts and Observations*. Two epigrams directed against Karamzin's *History* are also attributed to Pushkin.—Ed.

effect that Ekaterina Karamzina was still a beauty in 1816 is borne out by other reminiscences. Karamzin's biographer Adalbert-Woitech Starchevsky writes that in her youth she possessed rare beauty and retained traces of this beauty in old age. Ekaterina Karamzina's life-story was by no means an ordinary one. She was a half-sister of Pyotr Vyazemsky's; her birth out of wedlock meant she was unable to bear the title of Princess or her father's surname. Her maiden name was Kolyvanova, derived from the name of the town Reval (Kolyvan) where she was born. This clever and enlightened woman helped her husband in his research and read through all the proofs for *History of the Russian State*.

Yet she was not in the least cold, dispassionate or irreproachable. In her youth she had known a number of infatuations. Her relations with her step-daughter were far from steady. Vyazemsky referred to her temper as "terrible". Hers was a passionate nature rather than one distinguished by the "chiselled cold of oligarchic conversation".

Her character emerges clearly from Ekaterina Karamzina's letters to Vyazemsky. These are stylistically impeccable letters in a somewhat cold French which provide a marked contrast with the Russian notes added to her husband's letters written in naively popular language abounding in the liberties of style and grammatical mistakes which appealed to Pushkin in women's conversation:

That childish speech, that careless chatter,  
Full of mistakes and mispronounced...

Pushkin continued seeing Ekaterina Karamzina in Petersburg after he had left the Lyceum. In a letter dated March 23, 1820 (i.e. not long before Pushkin's banishment) she writes to Vyazemsky in a tone of gentle irony about Pushkin's wild ways: "Pushkin is fighting duels daily: thank the Lord they do not prove fatal, the adversaries always remain unharmed."

To judge by Pushkin's letters Ekaterina Karamzina was by no means engulfed in the personality of her celebrated husband but maintained an independent position of her own. In a verse note to Zhukovsky Pushkin writes:

Tell me, will you not call today  
On Karamzin, Karamzina?

An intimate knowledge of Pushkin's intonation allows us confidently to conclude that here we are confronted not by a straightforward insignificant repetition and rather tasteless



substitution for the surname in the plural but, on the contrary, by a meaningful emphasis of the feminine form of the name.

While in the South, Pushkin alluded to the name Karamzina three times side by side with the name of another of his Petersburg infatuations, the celebrated Avdotya Golitsina. On May 7, 1821, he wrote to Alexander Turgenev\* from Kishinev in the following vein: "Without the Karamzins, without the two of you, and certain others as well, life would be so tedious even in a livelier place than Kishinev; away from the hearth of Princess Golitsina one would shiver even under Italian skies." In another letter addressed to Alexander Turgenev from Odessa on December 1, 1823 Pushkin wrote: "Thank you for reassuring me with regard to Katerina and Nikolai Karamzin but how fares the unforgettable, poetic, constitutional, anti-Polish, divine Princess Golitsina?" In a further letter to the same correspondent of July 14, 1824, Pushkin linked the two names yet again: "I kiss the hand of Katerina Karamzina and Princess Golitsina constitutionnelle ou anti-constitutionnelle, mais toujours adorable comme la liberté."

On December 20, 1824, Pushkin addresses the following request to his brother: "Write me something about Karamzin, -a, -s." Once again of course this constitutes a disguised request for information about precisely the wife.

Thus we find Pushkin using Ekaterina Karamzina's name in the same breath with that of Princess Golitsina or her husband and family. Although the first association reveals the nature of the interest, nevertheless the inclusion in such lists does mask the quite distinct significance which that name possessed for Pushkin.

The names of Karamzin and Karamzina appear separately, and Pushkin never links them together as a single entity.

Even the very little we do know about Ekaterina Karamzina makes it quite clear that she was most independent. This is reflected for example in her letter to Alexander Turgenev written from Reval on August 11, 1826, soon after Karamzin's death: "How we suffered on learning of the terrible arrests of the accused; your plight and that of the Muravyovs\*\* filled us with the very saddest of thoughts. You at least, at present have something of a respite, but their suspense is terrible." She goes on to wish him "the courage essential to enable you to wait for

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\* Alexander Turgenev, brother of the Decembrist Nikolai Turgenev.—*Ed.*

\*\* i.e., the mother and wife of the Decembrist Nikita Muravyov.—*Ed.*

a better future". This attitude to the fate of the Decembrists differs radically from that held by Karamzin himself.

Later the observant Alexandra Smirnova detected the special significance which the already ageing wife of Karamzin possessed for Pushkin, his special relationship to her: "I also took note of his behaviour towards Madame Karamzina: it was not simply respect paid to an already old woman, but something more intimate. He is extremely friendly and respectful towards Princess Vyazemskaya and Madame Khitrovo, but his behaviour with Ekaterina Karamzina is something quite different." And this despite the fact that there had been a time when Pushkin had "paid court" to princess Vyazemskaya, and the blindly infatuated Khitrovo had been intimate with him.

When Pushkin married, the first name which figured in this connection is Karamzina. He showed a keen interest in her attitude to this step and sought her advice and support, as it were. He was anxious to hear her reactions.

On May 2, 1830 Pushkin wrote to Vyazemsky from Moscow: "Did you tell Katerina Andreyevna of my engagement? I am sure she will be sympathetic, but do tell me what she said — those words are vital for my heart that does not know complete happiness even now."

After his marriage Pushkin wrote to Ekaterina Karamzina together with his wife. She, for her part, replied to the poet and Natalya Nikolayevna separately. Her letter to Pushkin is by no means just a conventional nicety. She wrote (in French on March 3, 1831): "I was very grateful that you should think of me in the first moments of your happiness; this was a true demonstration of your friendship." She expressed the hope that now Pushkin's life would be as quiet and peaceful as it was wild and sombre hitherto, and that Pushkin's heart that had always been so kind would be rendered pure at the side of a young wife. It filled Ekaterina Karamzina's heart with happiness to be the witness of the poet's tranquil, pure joy. At the same time the words addressed to Natalya Nikolayevna are of a quite different tone. In the first place the older woman answers the "kind lines" not with an individual letter but merely by asking Pushkin to "transmit her thoughts" to his wife: "I authorise you to be my ambassador to Madame Pushkina, to express my gratitude to her for her kind lines and tell her that I gratefully accept the youthful friendship she offers me and assure her that despite my stern and cold exterior she will find in me a heart ready to love her always and in particular if she safeguards the happiness of her husband."

Thus Ekaterina Karamzina demanded that Pushkin's wife should ensure the poet's happiness.

How closely Madame Karamzina was involved with Pushkin the poet and with his writings is made clear in reminiscences of Natalya Nikolayevna's daughter, Alexandra Arapova whose account of her mother is based on her own recollections and stories passed down to her: "Since she held the authority of Karamzina, Zhukovsky and Vyazemsky in profound respect, she never attempted to hold Pushkin back when she knew that he was anxious to turn to them for advice...."

The nature of this relationship can be deduced from the following fact for example: on July 22, 1833, Pushkin requested permission to visit Derpat to see Ekaterina Karamzina before leaving for Kazan and Orenburg. (The visit did not, however, take place.)

Ekaterina Karamzina was one of the very few people whom Pushkin initiated in the details of his personal tragedy exploited by his enemies to bring about his death. Before his death he asked to see her.

Zhukovsky noted the following about their last meeting: " 'Madame Karamzina? Is she here?' he asked after a short while. She was not, but word was sent to her immediately and she soon arrived. The meeting only lasted a few moments, but when Ekaterina Andreyevna stepped back from the bed, Pushkin called to her and said: 'Make the sign of the cross over me!' Then he kissed her hand."

Vyazemsky also records this meeting, and it would appear more accurately, reproducing Pushkin's actual words (the only Russian sentence in the French text of his letter to E.N. Orlova dated February 6, 1837). "When it came to the turn of Madame (Karamzina) she made the sign of the cross from a distance as she took her leave of him.

" 'Come nearer,' he said, 'and make the sign of the cross over me properly.' "

Turgenev notes that she then broke into sobs and left the room.

The extremely well-informed sister of Strudza Edling wrote in connection with that meeting at the death-bed to the poet V.G. Teplyakov on March 17, 1837, in these words: "I was very touched by the news that the first person whom Pushkin asked to see after the catastrophe was Madame Karamzina, the object of his first and pure attachment."

Pushkin's first love known only to those who knew all, and which he remembered on his death-bed—such was the relationship between Pushkin and Ekaterina Karamzina.

He had no reason whatever to *hide* his love for either Maria Golitsina or Maria Rayevskaya.

Yet there was every reason for Pushkin to hide his love and passion for Madame Karamzina throughout the whole of his life. She was almost twenty years older than he (as was Avdotya Golitsina), the wife of a great writer, an authority and guide not only for the literary tastes of Pushkin's youth but also for the whole of the elder generation from his father Sergei Lvovich and uncle Vassili Lvovich to Vyazemsky: she was sacrosanct, her very name forbidden in that context.

## 3

The most important elegy in the cycle concerned with the "hidden love" mentioned and quoted by Gershenzon on more than one occasion is that entitled: *Light Wanes, in Sudden Haste Retreating*.

Until now it had not been known whose memory provided the central theme for this great elegy. The circumstances and date of its composition were known. Pushkin wrote to his brother from Kishinev on September 24, 1820 to say: "We sailed past the southern shores of Tauria to Gurzuf where the Rayevsky family was staying. That night on board ship I wrote this Elegy which I am sending to you; send it on to Grech without a signature."

This means that the elegy was written at the end of August 1820 on board a brig provided by General Rayevsky to bring Pushkin and his companions from Theodosia to Gurzuf. In this elegy dated 1820 there are two references (at the beginning and the end) to a love of former years:

..... I recapture  
 The mad, tempestuous love of half-forgotten years ,  
 .....  
 ..... But of pain my heart is still not free;  
 Its wounds remain unhealed, my fondest hopes defeating... ✓

The phrase "*half-forgotten years*" used in 1820 could only refer to years separated by time and distance from the years spent in Petersburg immediately prior to the time of writing. Just such a year was 1816, when Pushkin first made Ekaterina Karamzina's acquaintance, to which the elegy *Happy Is Who Undismayed*... relates.

Literary historians noted a curious contradiction in the elegy which seemed to defy explanation: while speaking of places that he is seeing *for the first time*, past which he is travelling for the first time, Pushkin speaks of his memories linked with *those very places*, memories of love:

A southern land, a land enchanted,  
My heart with longing filled, I see before me lie;  
I gaze on it, enthralled, by dulcet memory  
To shores left far behind transplanted....

.....  
..... I recapture  
The mad, tempestuous love of half-forgotten years,  
With all its sufferings and joys, however fleeting....

Polivanov attempts to explain this passage with the help of generalisations: "With this locality cherished memories are linked, for they remind him of an earlier love. The elegy does not possess precise autobiographical significance since it was composed as the poet was approaching the southern coast of the Crimea for the first time and could not therefore be expressing any specific emotions linked with that part of the world. It is merely a poetic representation of the whole range of man's emotions..." etc.

All this is far from convincing.

Indeed, the distinctive feature of Pushkin's elegies was precisely that they did give expression to actual and specific emotions.

We have no right or justification to assume that in these lines a profound poetic link between a place seen by the poet for the first time and memories of an earlier love—a link which constituted the very foundation of the elegy—is merely invented.

The name of Ekaterina Karamzina makes everything fall into place.

It is established that her husband had a part to play in alleviating Pushkin's fate and in the choice of the Crimea for his place of exile.

On May 17, 1820, Karamzin wrote to Vyazemsky: "Meanwhile Pushkin, after several days of unpoetic trepidation with regard to his verses on liberty and certain epigrams, promised me he would curb his tongue and left for the Crimea without mishap to spend about five months there. He was given a thousand roubles for the journey. He was, I believe, moved by the magnanimity of his sovereign, which was indeed moving. It

would take a long time to relate all in detail but if Pushkin does not mend his ways now, he will be indeed beyond redemption. We shall have to see what epilogue he writes to his little poem! ”

This letter is revealing in that it reflects Karamzin's barely controlled irritation at Pushkin, and is written in an almost abusive tone. It is possible that Karamzin reckoned that Pushkin would include words of gratitude addressed to his “magnanimous sovereign” in the epilogue to his *Ruslan and Ludmilla* referred to semi-contemptuously here as “his little poem”.

If that was what he hoped for, Pushkin was to disappoint him, since in the epilogue to that poem, far from extolling Alexander's magnanimity, Pushkin extols the magnanimity of the friends who had saved him from his undoing.

When ruin threatened me.... The angle  
Of my first careless, stormy days,  
O, Friendship, tender, true sustainer  
Of my sick soul on all its ways!  
You pleaded, and the storm passed by me.

Friendship meant the united front created by progressive society, which came to Pushkin's rescue with Chaadaev at its head. Yet there is little doubt that the phrase “tender, true sustainer” refers in particular to Madame Karamzina.

Her part in reconciling her husband and Pushkin, or even in interceding for the latter is quite clear. It is hardly likely that without that and in response merely to Chaadaev's protestations Karamzin would have taken steps to help Pushkin, seeing that he still bore him a grudge even after the poet had been banished to the South. Vyazemsky recalls that later Karamzin was to regret having acted on Pushkin's behalf: “Karamzin must be nursing a grudge against Pushkin for compromising his intercession in 1820, although even Karamzin writes that Pushkin had promised at the time to behave well for a period of two years.”

When republishing the poem *Ruslan and Ludmilla* in 1828 Pushkin emphasised quite clearly the importance of the epilogue and provided a more narrow interpretation of the word “Friendship” here: in the preface to the poem he recalled the hostile reception it had from Karamzin and Dmitriev. Meanwhile the lines:

....Friendship, tender, true sustainer  
Of my sick soul...

referred not so much to Karamzin and Dmitriev, as precisely to Karamzina.

Karamzin's letter also mentions that Pushkin visited his house after the news came through that the poet's place of banishment would be the Crimea. Inevitably, on the occasion of this visit (perhaps not the only one) a highly significant conversation must have taken place between Karamzin and Pushkin. It is quite natural to assume that at this last meeting conversations must have centred round the place that Pushkin was leaving for, which was new and unfamiliar, a source of interest for everyone.

Karamzin's interest in the Crimea is borne out precisely in connection with that particular period. On February 20, 1820, he asks Vyazemsky to inform someone that in his *History* he had included all that was known to him concerning Jews in mediaeval Russia, pointing out: "From the tenth century onwards they are to be found in the Crimea, the Caucasus and Kiev."

Ekaterina Karamzina was well-versed in literature and history and used to help her husband in his work, so her conversations with Pushkin about the Crimea on the occasion of their last meeting before his departure might well provide the hitherto obscure reason as to why the coast of the Crimea which Pushkin was seeing for the first time evoked in him profound and direct recollection of his love.

This meeting and conversation also help to explain much that has so far eluded us in connection with the idea behind *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. Gershenzon is right when he points out that: "the image of the same woman 'haunted' him when he was standing before the Fountain of Tears in Bakhchisarai, and he alludes to her in the concluding lines of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*".

The whole of the rough draft for the epilogue of this poem is concerned with the same hidden love which we find in the elegy *Light Wanes, in Sudden Haste Retreating* and indeed described in still more tangible terms.

Plunged deep in dreams none guessed but I  
I was profoundly occupied.

\*

Or had the sweet and clement sun  
Of my unhappy, secret passion—  
Then... No, enough! for you are flown,  
Lost dreams of years now past and gone,  
And your mad flames have sunk in ashes  
Where my cooled ardour hotly shone.

\*

Enough! O, dreamer! Dream no more!  
 Do not stir up again the vain  
 Remembrance of blind love, love's sadness,  
 By which thou wast enthralled of yore....  
 Come, be thyself—come, slave, how long  
 Wouldst thou, obedient, kiss thy chain  
 And tell the world in dismal song  
 The sorry story of thy madness?

\*

Forget the object, grievous yet,  
 Of errors that cannot be righted.

\*

What dost thou look for, mockery?

\*

As well the weakness of thy youth forget.

\*

Now trials have made a man of thee  
 Thy youthful deeds thou canst forget.  
 Of shameful tears the memory,  
 Disconsolate expectancy,  
 Forget the object, grievous yet.

Here the actual epithets are most revealing: we find blind love's sadness, madness, and most important of all, *secret* passion. Yet the poet's concealment of his love does not extend to his poetry, he tells the world the story of his madness "in dismal song".

In the final draft this passage appeared as follows:

And I recall a look as dear,  
 A beauty yet to earth belonging;  
 And in my lonely exile here  
 My heart's thoughts fly to her with longing....  
 Enough! O, madman! Rave no more,  
 Do not stir up again in vain  
 The rebel dreams, the loving sadness,  
 By which thou wast enthralled of yore,—  
 Come, be thyself; pris'ner, how long  
 Wouldst thou, despondent, kiss thy chain  
 And tell the world in shameless song  
 The sorry story of thy madness?

Here especial interest is centred in the lines:



And I recall a look as dear,  
*A beauty yet to earth belonging.*

This could only refer to the ageing Ekaterina Karamzina.

However, in the final draft the more direct aspects of the rough draft have been played down. In the first edition of the poem (1824) Pushkin took out another ten lines beginning with:

And in my lonely exile here....

Meanwhile the rough draft provides a spontaneous comment, as it were, a poetic diary complete with autobiographical details. The "mad, tempestuous love" of Pushkin's elegy *Light Wanes, in Sudden Haste Retreating* is referred back precisely to his youth and looks back to the ridicule experienced in those early years, the false steps and "shameful tears".

Here we have the poetic echo of the stories related by Bludov about the Karamzins laughing over Pushkin's love letters and about the spot in their Chinese house at Tsarskoye Selo once a witness to Pushkin's tears.

No, this is not a Petersburg infatuation with a sophisticated singer, nor a transient Southern passion for a young girl, but the love of his early years at the Lyceum, the "errors that cannot be righted" perpetrated in his early youth.

#### 4

The actual composition of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* is also linked with recollections of Ekaterina Karamzina and her account of the Crimea.

On August 25, 1823 Pushkin wrote to his brother from Odessa: "Tumansky is here. He is a good fellow but lies on occasions—for example he wrote a letter to St. Petersburg which in passing mentions in connection with me: 'Pushkin at once opened his heart and his porte-feuille to me—love-life, etc.'—actually I merely read him excerpts from *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (my new poem) saying that I did not want to print it because many parts of it refer to a woman with whom I was in love for a very long time and to the point of stupidity, and the role of Petrarch was not to my liking. Tumansky presum-

that I was confinding my love in him and tries to make me out as another Shalikov\*—Help! ”

How close these feelings, recollections and thoughts were to his poetry, and the extent to which they were poetic thoughts emerges from the end of the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin* that was completed in October 1823, i.e., a mere two months after the letter to his brother was written:

The *mad* inquietude of love  
*Disconsolate* I underwent.  
 How happy he who blends a bent  
 For rhyme therewith: for so he doubles  
 The sacred frenzy of the muses,  
 Following where Petrarch chooses  
 To lead, both salving his heart's troubles  
 And catching fame, too, on the run.  
 But I, in love, was dull and dumb.

\*

The cooling ashes lie quiescent  
 I sorrow yet, but weep no more,  
 And soon, now, soon—the tempest's roar  
 Within my soul will fall to silence.

Petrarch (both in the letter and this passage from *Eugene Onegin*) becomes a poetic term of reference for Pushkin: he personifies the poet of *platonic* love. The lines:

The *mad* inquietude of love  
*Disconsolate* I underwent.

echo the elegy, where the expression “the *mad, tempestuous* love” describes the early “hidden” love of the youthful Pushkin:

Anxiety that the hidden significance of the poem *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* might be revealed did not stop Pushkin from talking about it. On February 8, 1824, he wrote to Bestuzhev from Odessa: “I am glad that my fountain is bubbling away. The shortcomings of the overall plan are not my fault. Superstitiously I rendered in verse a story told me by a young woman:

Aux douces lois des vers je pliais les accents  
 De sa bouche aimable et naïve.

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\* Prince P.I. Shalikov aroused general ridicule when among other things he took a new lease of life at the age of fifty—kept falling in love and writing amorous verse.—*Ed.*

Pushkin's eagerness to speak out is unusually strong here, and the phrase about a young woman (which ill applies to Madame Karamzina at that period) serves in no way as a mask for the figure concerned but rather as a reflection of its power over the poet, a rendering of the opening lines from André Chenier's *La jeune captive*.

Ainsi triste et captif, ma lyre toutefois  
S'éveillait, écoutant ces plaintes, cette voix,  
Ces vœux d'une jeune captive;  
Et secouant le joug de mes jours languissants,  
Aux douces lois des vers je pliais les accents  
De sa bouche aimable et naïve.

As often with Pushkin, a quotation may very well have broader implications than might appear at first glance. The figure of the "young captive", like that of the days spent pining (*mes jours languissants*) might well be echoes of Pushkin's own "captivity" at the Lyceum and the isolation of the beautiful Ekaterina in Tsarskoye Selo.

This lack of modesty on the part of the poet in his writing was immediately taken up. Bulgarin\* made use of the letter and had it printed in *Literaturnye Listki* (Literary Leaves)—Part I of issue 4, 1824—in the form of an extract entitled: *Inadequate Plan*, etc.

Pushkin was then worried lest this friendly, almost loving *recollection* demonstrating his lack of modesty, might come to the notice of the woman he loved. On June 29, 1824, he wrote: "...the devil knows what led me to write some emotional lines with reference to the *Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and recall at the same time my lady of the elegies. Imagine my despair when I saw them in print. That journal may well find its way to her. What on earth will she think seeing how readily I discuss her with one of my Petersburg friends. She has no means of knowing that I did not name her and that the letter was unsealed and printed by Bulgarin.... I confess that I set more store by this woman's opinion than I do by the opinion of every journal under the sun and of our entire reading public. My head reels at the thought."

Here we have Pushkin at his most typical: he has to conceal

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\* Bulgarin, Faddey Venediktovich—Russian journalist and writer. In his editorials he attacked Pushkin, Gogol, Belinsky. He informed on writers to the secret police.—*Ed.*

from all his love, the name of this woman, and yet the urge to come out with it and name her tortures him to such an extent that time and time again he almost loses control of himself and says too much. In his *Excerpts from Onegin's Travels* (1827) Pushkin recalls his impressions of the Crimea and the emotions that accompanied them:

Essential—as I thought—to me  
 Were deserts and the sounding sea,  
 The massive cliffs, the breaker's pearl,  
 The ideal of a haughty girl  
 And sufferings *without a name* ....

"The ideal of a haughty girl" reads — in the first rough version:

And for good measure the ideal  
 Of any supercilious girl.

This reflects not the emotions but the "high-flown dreams" of that period.

Yet the line referring to "sufferings without a name" on which these recollections end is an unchanged reference to the same love that is repeated again and again in Pushkin's poetry, a love which he could not name.

By the time we come to the *Travels of Onegin* it no longer appeared necessary for this love to remain nameless.

Perhaps indeed that had already been the case in 1824.

In any case Pushkin was no longer able to control his desire to designate his nameless love and referred to the object of his affections with the first letter of her surname.

In December 1824 Pushkin wrote an autobiographical sketch, an account of his travels in which he sums up the significance of his sojourn in the Crimea. This detailed sketch was written in the form of a letter to his friend Delwig, which, for some reason, until recently was listed among Pushkin's letters as a letter to Delwig written in Mikhailovskoye.

The care with which this letter was reworked and recopied points to the significance it possessed for the author.

In the first draft all surnames are conveyed by initials. "M's journey revived many memories in me..." he writes in connection with Muravyov-Apostol's *Journey Through the Crimea in 1820*. Soon after he writes: "My mind was filled with thoughts in verse about Ch — here 'they are' — this is a reference to his *Epistle to Chaadaev*. After this he found it impossible to refrain any longer from naming the woman he loved and the initial of her surname appears: "I was told about

the Kerim Gerei fountain [about a strange monument erected by a love-lorn khan]. [K's poetic imagination called it] K described it poetically referring to it as 'la fontaine des larmes'."

While re-writing the letter twice and introducing corrections Pushkin wrote Ekaterina's initial three times.

The end of the letter makes it clear how closely these dreams were linked with recollections which bestirred the poet in the Crimea and inspired the elegy *Light Wanes, in Sudden Haste Retreating* and the poem *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, not those connected with the Crimea itself. "Explain to me now: why do the southern shore and Bakhchisarai possess such inexplicable enchantment for me? Why is there such a strong desire within me to visit again those places which I left with such indifference? Is recollection perhaps our heart's most powerful gift and does it enchant all that lies within memory's power?"

The Crimea which Pushkin left with such indifference was for him a place where he was subject to the power wielded by memories.

So at last Ekaterina Karamzina has almost been granted a name.

The story of the "fountain of tears" which she had told Pushkin in Petersburg provided the original source of inspiration for the poem which was to give voice to memories of that torturing love.

It was precisely she, being so well-versed in items of historical interest, who might have known the old legend of the "fountain of tears" in Bakhchisarai.

*The Letter to Delwig* was printed in the journal *Severnyye Tsvety* (Flowers of the North) in 1826 under the title: "Extract from a letter by A.S. Pushkin to D."

It might appear that Pushkin through this letter was attempting to put an end to the silence so carefully observed hitherto, to reveal the meticulously concealed name of the woman, memories of whom inspired both the epilogue of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and the elegies.

At the same time the initial provided, as it were, an unofficial dedication, a masked indication of the fact that the idea for the poem was linked with the name Karamzina.

It is probable that the *Letter* itself was a fruit of the desire to make just such a "dedication". If we recall that the poem *Ruslan and Ludmilla* is dedicated primarily to this woman, then it becomes clear that not only her name but also the actual dedication to the "lady of the elegies" still remained a secret.

In Volume II of the old Academy edition of Pushkin's works there is a brief and unfounded comment to the effect that K\*\*\* is Ekaterina Nikolayevna Rayevskaya (Vol. 2, 1905, p. 346). The note applying to the initial merely reads: "Katerina Nikolayevna Rayevskaya, who soon afterwards married M.F. Orlov."

Quite apart from the fact that in Pushkin's writings capital letters followed by three asterisks are never used to designate Christian names but always surnames, not once in his letters did Pushkin ever refer so simply to Ekaterina Nikolayevna Rayevskaya, using only her Christian name—Katerina or Katya. Their relationship was of a quite different kind. Moreover he was later actually to sum up her character: while working on *Boris Godunov* Pushkin mentions Katerina Orlova whose character provided a model for the heroine Marina.

"My Marina is a capital woman: a real Katerina Orlova! " (in a letter to Vyazemsky from Mikhailovskoe of September 13, 1825). Later we find the most unceremonious of references: "Marina's eminently ..., for she is Polish and ravishing (like Katerina Orlova, or did I say that to you earlier?)"—again in a letter to Vyazemsky, this time dated November 7, 1825.

This enterprising heroine does not call to mind the "lady of the elegies".

Shchegolev, who insisted that Pushkin's "hidden love" was another of the Rayevsky sisters, namely Maria, suggested an interpretation that has been accepted this far: "It is clear that Pushkin in making this new admission regarding the background to *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* sought specifically to put an end to interpretations of his earlier admission that were unpleasant for him", etc. Thus he would have us believe that the letter K\*\*\* is a pure fabrication intended to mislead Delwig and others. It would then be a mystery why Pushkin in rewriting and altering the text of the letter never had any second thoughts or used any other letter. Or did Pushkin perhaps have in mind some specific woman he cast for this role of substitute? No details of Pushkin's biography bear this out. K\*\*\* could not be Ekaterina Rayevskaya. K\*\*\* is no figment of Pushkin's imagination, but an acknowledgement which was only made after a long struggle.

Pushkin's nameless love which he was obliged to hide throughout his life for important and profound reasons was neither Maria Volkonskaya, nor Maria Golitsina.

It was Ekaterina Karamzina.

Pushkin's love which he kept concealed this far was one of the most important threads in his biography.

## 5

Shchegolev is quite correct in connecting the enigmatic dedication of the poem *Poltava* with Pushkin's "hidden love", yet once more on the basis of insufficient evidence he links it with M. Volkonskaya.

"Pushkin maintained such a deep silence with regard to the person to whom *Poltava* is dedicated that not even any allusions allowing us to make more enlightened guesses have survived in his correspondence or in the reminiscences of his friends and relations."

The *Dedication* was written on October 27, 1828.

To you.... But will the Muse obscure  
Now touch some chord of recognition?  
And will your soul, so modest, pure,  
Now understand my heart's condition,  
Or will the poet's dedication  
Even as once his love before  
Pass by, without appreciation,  
As unacknowledged as of yore? ...  
But recognise the intonations  
Of one whose soul is dedicate  
To you—then through all separations,  
Throughout my fluctuating fate,  
Know now! Your converse and your face,  
Your wilderness austere  
My only treasure, my sole grace  
My only heart's love were....

In his controversy with Gershenzon Shchegolev makes a detailed study of this *Dedication* demonstrating that the poem was dedicated to M. Volkonskaya.

So let us now in our turn attempt to analyse the *Dedication* together with its variants.

In the first place the poem opens with a short phrase broken off in mid-air:

To you.... But will the Muse obscure  
' Now touch some chord of recognition?

And will your soul, so modest, pure,  
Now understand my heart's condition?

The poet addresses himself to a woman but fears lest she fail to understand that the lines are intended precisely for her, that the poem is dedicated to her.

It should be noted in passing that the expression "Muse obscure" should not be interpreted as "unknown Muse".

The Russian word *tyomny*—"dark", "obscure" in Pushkin's writing is used more often than not with the meaning "hidden", "incomprehensible", "mysterious".

It is in this sense that the word is employed in Zhukovsky's variant for *Verses Composed at Night When Sleep Eluded Me*:

To grasp your portent now I burn,  
Your meaning I would fain discern....

In Zhukovsky we find:

Your *dark* language I would learn....

Cf. Pushkin's lines addressed to Kozlov:

But not in vain on paths obscure  
I wandered the world's wilderness.

Later in the *Dedication* confirmation of the meaning of the word "obscure" is borne out by the following:

And will your soul, so modest, pure,  
Now understand my heart's condition?

Then comes a verse which makes it quite clear in what connection doubts occur:

Or will the poet's dedication  
Even as once his love before  
(variant: *Even as his hidden love before*)  
Pass by, without appreciation  
As unacknowledged as of yore? ...

Here it is pointed out first and foremost that at one time the poet's love was hidden, undeclared, and at the same time perhaps not so much not recognised as misunderstood, unacknowledged, unappreciated.

Yet here we are up against more than just a love that was neither acknowledged nor appreciated.

Rather this verse implies that various poetic dedications have not been acknowledged and appreciated perhaps because of "obscurity", because they were not understood.

Or will the poet's dedication  
(*Pass all unrecognised by you?* )  
Pass unacknowledged as of yore?



Such dedications could only be of a rather indirect, veiled variety.

Nothing is known of such or indeed any dedications to Maria Rayevskaya or Volkonskaya, as she later became.

Yet it is precisely this indirect, veiled type of dedication which we find in *Ruslan and Ludmilla* and *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, which, it would seem, did pass by unnoticed by Ekaterina Karamzina to whom they were addressed.

Literary historians paid particular attention to the following lines:

...through all separations,  
Throughout my fluctuating fate,  
Know now! Your converse and your face  
Your wilderness austere  
My only treasure, my sole grace,  
My only heart's love were...

The assumption that these lines were addressed to M. Volkonskaya was confirmed "beyond doubt" for Shchegolev when he discovered the following variant in the early drafts:

Siberia's frozen wilderness...

However precisely *this* variant makes it clear that he is labouring under an illusion. In the rough draft, according to Shchegolev's reading of the manuscript, Pushkin wrote:

And what without you was the [world] (?) [earth]  
Siberia's frozen wilderness....

In other words, not for her to whom the lines are dedicated but, on the contrary, for the poet without her the world is "Siberia's frozen wilderness". This is an unmistakable reference to the poet's protector when the threat of exile to Siberia hung over him, without whom the world for him would have been "Siberia's frozen wilderness".

An allusion to the Decembrists may well still be deduced from this variant; however, we are not confronted by any enamoured dedication to the wife of a Decembrist. Had it not been for Ekaterina Karamzina who came to Pushkin's rescue in 1820 he would have been in "Siberia's frozen wilderness" as the Decembrists then were—such are the implications of this poetic image.

Now we must consider the line in the final draft: "Your wilderness austere".

Soon after Karamzin's death on June 13, 1826 his family accompanied by Vyazemsky set out for Reval where they settled until the spring of 1828.

Is the expression "wilderness" applicable to Reval?

This word might of course have been used here not in its literal sense but rather as a poetic image.

Yet illuminating confirmation of the possibility is to be found in letters from Reval written by Karamzin's daughter, Ekaterina and also in a letter from Ekaterina Andreyevna herself to Alexander Turgenev dated August 11, 1826:

Karamzin's daughter writes: "Our life here is the same day in, day out—very isolated, very lonely, very mournful.... Although we are very pleased with our house, at times it gives me cause for some anxiety inevitable in these very wild surroundings. We are infested with snakes: they crawl around the courtyard, the garden and recently they caused a panic."

Ekaterina Karamzina herself writes: "In a few days' time our household will be subjected to a disastrous change on account of our dear P(yotr's)\* departure. Then we shall be left behind (*dans un abandon absolu*), not a single piece of news will reach us.... This state of isolation, abandonment and being bereft of all news is more in keeping with my mood than any other."

These extracts show that the sojourn in Reval might well be likened to an "austere wilderness", far away from friends and a familiar way of life.

This letter could have been seen by Pushkin; moreover we can presume that before he wrote *Poltava* and the dedication for it, the poet saw Ekaterina Karamzina. She spent the summer of 1828, from April onwards, in the old Chinese house, where Pushkin had visited her when still a student at the Lyceum.

What is more, there exists evidence that Pushkin did visit the Lyceum in Tsarskoye Selo in the spring or rather summer of 1828. It is hardly likely that while visiting the Lyceum Pushkin did not visit Karamzin's widow living at that time in Tsarskoye Selo, in the Chinese house which was so familiar to him.

In that case the lines:

... Your converse and your face  
(variant: *The last sound of your voice*)  
Your wilderness austere...

together represent a logical whole. The wilderness is that of the two years spent in Reval and the account of the same at the time of the poet's recent meeting with Ekaterina Karamzina.

It should be borne in mind that the meeting most probably

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\* i.e., Pyotr Vyazemsky.—Ed.

took place immediately after the Karamzins' arrival when their impressions of life in Reval were particularly fresh and vivid.

This would mean that "The last sound of your voice" referred to in the poem written in October 1828 was a recent memory that had not been blurred at all by time. Finally yet another interesting variant in the dedication falls into place in this context. I refer to the following line that was not included in the final version:

I gaze on it, enthralled, by dulcet memory....

This is a repetition of the poet's own words from the elegy: *Light Wanes, in Sudden Haste Retreating* bound up with the same memories about the same love, the same woman.

A southern land, a land enchanted,  
My heart with longing filled, I see before me lie;  
I gaze on it, enthralled, by dulcet memory  
To shores left far behind transplanted.

Thus the variant of the sixth line of the dedication: "Even as his hidden love before", like the expression: "suffering without a name" from *Excerpts from the Travels of Onegin* is an exact designation for a hitherto unknown detail of Pushkin's life.

## 6

One of Pushkin's greatest elegies: *Upon the Hills of Georgia Lies the Haze of Night* (1829) was until recently linked with the name of Natalya Goncharova.

It is indeed natural to assume that this elegy written after the poet's courtship was addressed precisely to her.

S.M. Bondi was the first to read the original draft of this elegy which radically altered the conception of this poem.

It reads as follows:

Upon the Caucasus descends the haze of night....  
Stars wink nearby.... All's still.... The sadness  
That fills the void of days is, strangely, half delight,  
'Tis both sweet pain and sweeter gladness.  
I'm yours as once I was.... My love for you endures,  
Bereft of hope yet never faithless.  
Like sacrificial flame, so is it clean and pure,  
And like a maid's dreams, chaste and taintless.\*

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\* Translated by Irina Zheleznova.—Ed.

Bondi outlines the reasons why Pushkin did not print the end of the poem:

"Immediately after winning the hand of Natalya Nikolayevna, Pushkin probably did not want to publish lines written at the height of his courtship that allude to his love for another woman ('I'm yours as once I was.... My love for you endures...'). In the first two verses that were printed this motif of a revival of a past love is sufficiently inconspicuous to allow commentators unacquainted with the 'continuation' to link these verses with Goncharova herself."

So here instead of the image of a new love, we find the image of an old love. Most relevant here is the eager anxiety with which Pushkin asked for Ekaterina Karamzina's reaction to news of his engagement, for her exact words: "those words are vital for my heart that does not know complete happiness even now."

We should also recall that Ekaterina Karamzina also thanked Pushkin for thinking about her in the first moments of his happiness.

Recollection of Pushkin's past love leaves no room for any others. The third verse of the draft for the elegy was as follows:

Day follows fleeting day. Time, wingéd, sweeps ahead.  
Those dear to me have fled my presence.  
Where are you, treasured ones? —Some, far, and some long dead,  
And naught is left me but remembrance.

This verse was crossed out by Pushkin, but he left the fourth:

I'm yours as once I was.... My love for you endures....  
There is little obscurity about this recollection.  
The variant reads:

I'm young and yours again, as long ago I was,  
No thought save thought of you gnaws at my heart, no image  
But yours within it flames....

Here we have the word "young" linking the memory with the poet's *early* youth; in the *Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, where we find a recollection of the same woman, the reference is also to "youth".

The elegy refers to the same woman to whom the dedication in *Poltava* is addressed:

My only treasure, my sole grace,  
My only heart's love...

These words are echoed in the line:

Like sacrificial flame, so is it clean and pure....

Then the fact that this love is not merely a love of the past but an *early* love is clear from the last line:

And like a maid's dreams, chaste and taintless.

It is thus clear how false is the persistent, at one time commonly accepted idea of Pushkin as an unstable, *frivolous* man constantly and casually flitting from one infatuation to the next: the passionate and torturing love conceived by a seventeen-year-old Lyceum student led the poet, at 37, to summon to his death-bed Ekaterina Karamzina, his "hidden", "nameless" love that was to accompany him throughout his life.

## SEMYON GHEICHENKO

Semyon Gheichenko is one of those remarkable people whose efforts help preserve for posterity historical and cultural treasures. He has been the curator of the Pushkin memorial estate in Pskov country for more than a quarter of a century. He first saw Mikhailovskoye during World War II, though not through the smoke of battle. Private of a mortar crew Semyon Gheichenko did not get quite as far as Pushkin Hills and was prevented from taking part in the fighting for that precious corner of his homeland by a wound. And the fighting there was stiff indeed. What did the nazis care for this holy of holies of Russian culture? They had dug an entrenchment under the famous oak at Trigor'skoye, they blew up the bell-tower at Svyatogorsk Monastery and laid mines around Pushkin's grave. As they retreated, the nazis left nothing but desolation behind them.

The then President of the USSR Academy of Sciences Sergei Vavilov looked out Gheichenko whom he knew as an experienced literary historian from Pushkin House in Leningrad. "I am putting my trust in you," he said. "Get started on restoration work immediately." Gheichenko arrived at Pushkin Hills in the spring of 1945 and has been there ever since. The number of visitors who have come to pay homage to Pushkin at Mikhailovskoye has already passed the million mark. People come here from all parts of the globe. Important research is being conducted here. *Glimpses of Mikhailovskoye* which are published here are the work of a

writer who is infinitely skilled not merely in the presentation of factual material but also in carrying on where the documents end, in conjuring up a bygone era, thanks to his astute sense of the continuity between past and present.

The Pushkin memorial estate (which incorporates the villages of Mikhailovskoye, Trigorskoye and Petrovskoye and the former Svyatogorsk Monastery) is an essential part of the great poet's experience and work. Pushkin came here in 1817–1819, when he was “a gay youth” full of radiant hopes and noble aspirations; here he spent two long years (1824–1826) as an “outcast”, an already famous poet exiled to the wilds for his love of freedom; shortly before his tragic death feeling sick and tormented, he longed to escape to Mikhailovskoye once more from the harassment of gendarmes and the society mob to work in its peaceful solitude, and it was here that he asked to be buried.



Alexander Pushkin. Self-portrait. 1826





## GLIMPSES OF MIKHAILOVSKOYE

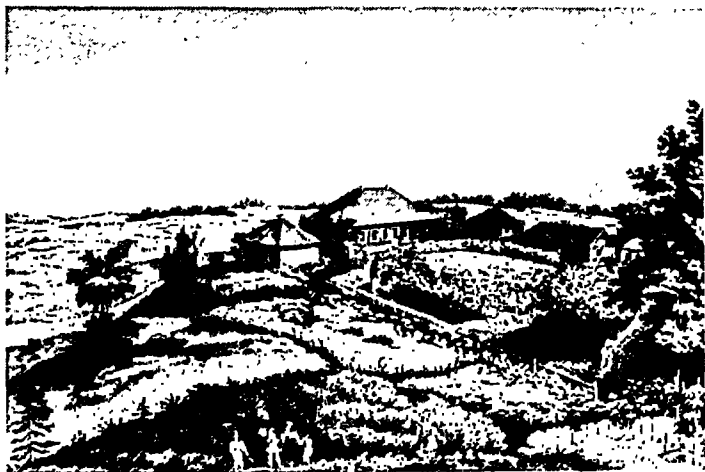
### *Hidden Characters*

When people die, things carry on as before. Silent objects remind us that they are more lasting than people—an age-old truth. There are no inanimate objects, but there are inanimate people. Without Pushkin's possessions or the natural surroundings in which the poet lived it would be difficult to reach an understanding of his life and writing. In their time the poet's contemporaries were well aware of this and perhaps best of all Alexander Turgenev, who wrote of Pushkin's house, the pine-trees, lilac, promenade at Mikhailovskoye, and much else besides.

Today Pushkin's belongings are to be found in museums, where they live a peculiar, mysterious life all of their own, and where their keepers peruse the hidden characters they conceal. I have watched hundreds of thousands of people of different ages, backgrounds and interests at Mikhailovskoye, and they all had the one purpose in common: to come and see this "world" that the poet had lived in.

When I tell them: "Pushkin used to like sitting at that window," they all notice at those words that the window is something out of the ordinary, that none of them had ever seen a window like that before, that they had failed to see the green bush just outside it which is quite unique, that above that bush there is the sky just as it was in Pushkin's time, and clouds, and that in the paine is reflected the silhouette of a passing bird, just like those he may have watched.

Many many years after Pushkin was dead when the doors and windows were all peeling and the entrance to Pushkin's house was quite dilapidated—a riot of lilac still spread its fragrant clusters there. Someone's gentle fingers had planted and tended it till at last the lilac was tall enough to peep in at Pushkin's windows. Then everything was deserted and forgotten....



Village of Mikhailovskoye. By I. Ivanov. Lithograph. 1837



Arina Rodionovna, Alexander Pushkin's nurse. Bone carving by Y. Seryakov

Now the porch and the steps are straight and smooth once more, the windows are in good repair. More lilac bushes have been planted and just as in the past they offer up their flowers to the romantic traveller.

Each leaf of that bush can reveal hidden characters. Pushkin could decipher them, and in order to understand Pushkin the country and nature-lover, every visitor to Mikhailovskoye should attempt to puzzle them out as well.

When Pushkin was asked what his study was like he used to reply: "The countryside is my study."

The countryside or, in other words, nature: trees, grass, bushes, birds and animals. Pushkin loved this earth. He would walk through the woods without a coat, wearing only a simple shirt and often barefoot regardless of wind, rain or cold, by no means only when the weather was calm and warm. He saw that in Nature everything is timeless and that hardly anything ever changes, that Nature is eternity. It is only we people who change.

In the spring when life at Mikhailovskoye starts up again and people come out of the house they see and hear nothing but water, just as it was in Pushkin's day. Water seems to stream from everywhere, flooding the meadows and creating an enormous sea that swallows up all the streams and rivulets. The sea stretches across all the ground between the hills.

The scenery at Mikhailovskoye has its custodians. Pushkin writes of them in his poem *The House-Spirit*. The most faithful of them all is water.

Each day the trees, bushes, meadows and glades in the grounds show themselves to us in a new guise. Each morning the custodian of this gallery replaces one of the timeless pictures with another and reminds us as it were: "All this is what Pushkin beheld. Now you are to gaze on it. Let it inspire you."

When you visit Mikhailovskoye, make a point of going up to the fence round the estate, stand with your face to the little lake and shout: "Alexander Sergeyevich!" I assure you the answer is bound to come: "Ah-a-a! Co-oming!"

### *Pushkin Arranges his Study*

Houses can teach us much about their owners, and often when we look at someone we can imagine to ourselves what his house must be like. Yet sometimes a house and its master have nothing in common with each other, which means that both the house and its occupants will look miserable. They will seem

restless and out of place. Then again a person can fit in so well with his surroundings that at times it will be difficult to decide where the house stops and the master of the house starts.

While working on the restoration of Mikhailovskoye I devoted much thought to Pushkin's house, trying to picture to myself how it would have been arranged and what it would have looked like. Pushkin himself and his friends who visited him here were far from forthcoming in their descriptions of the house!

Then I thought to myself that while far away in the South Pushkin had placed the heroes of his *Eugene Onegin* in just such a village, in the same kind of countryside that surrounded him in Mikhailovskoye. Far away in the South he thought back wistfully to the old family house built on the slope of a hill, the enormous meadows, the little river, and beyond them, the cosses.

So Pushkin placed all his characters in this setting, in the heart of this Northern wilderness.

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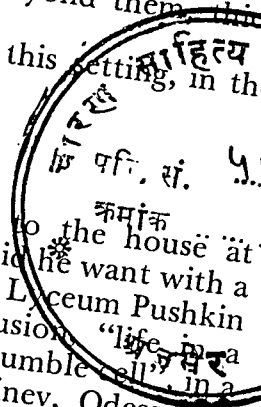
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Pushkin spent a long time getting used to the house at Mikhailovskoye. He would ask himself what did he want with a mansion after all? While still a student at the Lyceum Pushkin had appreciated the great advantage of seclusion "life in a cave". The rest of his life he had spent in a "humble cell", in a single room, whether in St. Petersburg, Kishinev, Odessa, in hotels or inns. He felt more able to collect and muster his thoughts in a single room, with everything to hand and surrounding himself with only the essentials. No time was wasted on the useless vanities and trivia of high society. No, never, never would he spend his time wandering about a large mansion. Never would he change his simple burrow of a room, his cave, complete with the faithful little chest that served as a head rest, his travelling lamp, ink-well and the leather trunk that accompanied him wherever he went!

After his parents left, Pushkin spent a long time examining his grandfather's house. At first he was attracted by a room in the centre which had once been a reception room of Hannibal's\*

\* Abram Hannibal (1697-1781)—Pushkin's great-grandfather, a prominent military engineer and statesman. The son of an Abyssinian prince, he was brought as a prisoner to Turkey and then to Russia, where Peter the Great took the young boy under his wing.—Ed.



and where the walls were hung with portraits of his ancestors. The windows and the door on the Sorot side opened on to a balcony from which there was a wonderful view of the surrounding countryside. Yet other rooms led off this one and it was in bad repair: the wall coverings were in shreds and beneath the shreds nothing but a seething mass of bed-bugs. Instead he settled for the adjacent room which had been his parents' bedroom. Yet it had a mournful air about it and in bad weather, when fierce North winds were blowing, the through draughts were strong enough to carry his papers off the table.

There was a good deal of furniture and other objects dear to the heart of Pushkin's grandfather and parents in the room: the enormous chest of drawers for instance, its drawers sitting as tight as rotten corks in bottles of Tsimlyanskoye sparkling wine, armchairs and uprights—Pskov "Jacobean" and "Chippendale" that he had known from childhood, a billiard table with large tears in the green felt where the chipped balls were apt to stick. Double and single beds galore, cupboards, chests, couches, a mountain of pottery covered with knife and fork scratch marks, and simple earthenware. In the corner of his parents' bedroom stood a book-case containing surveyors' plans of the estate, the lakes, woods, villages, business and housekeeping papers, calendars, notebooks, a Bible and a few French novels, where mice and rats had been making havoc.

Then he found an old album with a bronze clasp and tied together with a pink ribbon. On the very first page he found a wreath of forget-me-nots and an anchor—symbol of hope. Underneath there was a dedication in his father's careful hand: "To my heart's angel, my inimitable Nadya from her faithful and devoted husband. July 1801." This was followed by a whole heap of bad verse-couplets, verses and sonnets. Pushkin smiled to himself and mused: "Faithful and devoted ... don't we know....!"

Yet how interesting to think that all the Pushkins, the whole family were poets. His father, mother, brother, sister, two uncles and Alexander Sergeyevich himself. A whole clan of poets, a Parnassus all of their own!

Nadezhda, sweet Hope, my dear destinie,  
Oh whither, mine angel, art now flown from me?

And elsewhere:

Felled by the fatal storm  
Shrivelled by great Perun, the oak lies on the ground,

While yet about its trunk the clinging ivy's wound....  
 Ah friendship, here is they symbolic form!

Yes ... dear old Sergei Lvovich, the poetic soul! How he  
 used to let himself go!

Further on he came to:

A peaceful home, joy of my fleeting years—  
 Lake, forest, garden, all dear haunts of mine,  
 Where 'neath luxuriant trees I shed so many tears,  
 Where stillness eased my heart as it did pine  
     For you, my friends, ah more than I can tell,  
     To whom I now must bid a last farewell.

“The first two lines pass muster, they have something of my  
*House-Spirit* about them....”

With that he closed the album and pocketed it....

When he had surveyed the whole of the house Pushkin at  
 last made his final choice, singling out a large light room with a  
 south view looking onto the garden and the promenade and all  
 the flower-beds. This particular room was always cheerful and  
 sunny, and you could see the whole of the estate stretched out  
 before you as if on the palm of your hand. Everything he  
 needed was within reach and there was a good large fireplace,  
 and a box-room to hand. What more could he ask for?

Pushkin then gave orders for the bailiff, the men-servants  
 and his old nurse to be sent for. They began moving furniture  
 about and removing part of it from the house altogether. Some  
 pieces of furniture proved stubborn like aged relatives and  
 refused to come out of the doors and so had to be thrown out  
 of the windows. The men-servants were horrified at this  
 sacrilege, but their master, nothing daunted, laughed gaily as he  
 dispensed his orders. Everything of any value was moved out  
 into Pushkin's parents' bedroom and the rest was taken out to  
 be stored in sheds. The dining-room was turned into a shooting  
 range. For targets there was the top of the enormous table and  
 the books of études for the piano which Olga had once played,  
 a whole heap of which had been found in the cupboard.

He gave orders for the central room to be doused down with  
 boiling water and the wall coverings to be patched, and the  
 ceiling whitewashed, after which it was designated as a room for  
 the reception of members of the nobility of both sexes from the  
 first five classes in the Table of Ranks, if such were to request  
 an audience.

Later more orders were given: “His Honour's personal  
 apartment is to be supplied with two book-cases, a couch, a



dressing-table and four armchairs. The bed is to be placed in the corner concealed behind a curtain which Nurse Rodionovna is to procure without delay. The travelling trunk is to be under the divan, while the box of pistols and books are not to be touched on pain of death! This shall suffice! "

Later when left alone Pushkin opened his writing case and casket to arrange his personal bits and pieces in his new study. Out came the portraits of Zhukovsky and Byron, his snuff-box, candle-holder, ink-well, "rough-book" and a hat-block Pushkin then moved one of the armchairs over to the window, clambered into it sitting on his heels and propping his elbows on the window-sill, and stared out into the garden. Not such a bad place after all! But by Heaven, by all the saints and martyrs, surely I am not destined to live here for any length of time? Perhaps even forever, till the end of my life? ... No! No! No! " He rose to his feet, opened the case with his pistols, went back to the window, aimed into the blue beyond and fired.

A flock of crows soared skywards from the tops of the nearby trees.

### *The Servants at Mikhailovskoye*

The early days of his banishment in Mikhailovskoye seemed like a prison sentence to Pushkin. He was gripped by wild rage and everything irritated him. He sulked, shouted at people, sought to drown his sorrows.... He would send for a horse in the early morning and just ride off into the distance, and this particular galloping horseman might often be encountered far, far away from Mikhailovskoye. Both steed and rider would be covered in sweat when they came home. The poet used to ride the length and breadth of the surrounding country—as far as Novorzhev, Opochka, Ostrov, Pskov, Porkhov and on one occasion went almost as far as Novgorod.

Then there was abrupt change, and Pushkin all of a sudden felt as happy as the day is long at home in Mikhailovskoye. What had happened? It was work that saved the situation. Pushkin grew attached to the local countryside, found loyal friends in Trigoriskoye.... But that was not all. He discovered the simple country people and they opened their hearts to him.

All at once he was confronted by a whole new world of folk culture. He started to spend whole days and nights in the village and pay frequent visits to the servants' quarters. He witnessed in person a traditional wedding ceremony which he was subsequently to record. He was a guest at peasant festivities and

acted godfather at a number of christenings. On the second Monday after Easter he would join the peasants for their traditional visit to the cemetery to honour the memory of their dead. On winter evenings he liked to sit in the servants' quarters or his old nurse's room listening to folk-tales and songs, many of which he noted down and was later to use for his writing. He was fond of balalaika music and appreciated how this simple instrument provided a key to the Russian people's soul. He fell in love with one of the girls, who answered his affections. Pushkin became acquainted with the life of the peasants not only as far as its hardship was concerned, but also came to understand the immortal beauty of age-old customs and traditions, the secrets of the character of the Russian peasant. All this new knowledge Pushkin was to glean here, in Mikhailovskoye.

In near-by Pskov in the State Archives it is possible to study the *Census Lists* for Mikhailovskoye for the years 1825, 1836, and 1838. These enable us to learn the exact names of all the house-serfs of both sexes living in Mikhailovskoye at the time that Pushkin was there. From this source we can find out not only their names but also their trades and their ages. When the poet was in exile, there were seventeen serfs there, while in the year of his death there were only nine. The remainder had either been transferred to Boldino at his parents' instructions or taken to work in the St. Petersburg household.

In the *Inventory of Mikhailovskoye* carried out in accordance with the ukaz issued by the Opochnka trustees for the family and property of A.S. Pushkin on May 18, 1838, by the district police superintendent Vassyukov and attorney Pastukhovsky in the presence of two witnesses, all immovable and movable property in this village belonging to the Pushkin family is listed, including the Mikhailovskoye serfs.

In that year there were nine:

Eremai Sidorov, aged 75, shepherd;

Avdotya Sergeyeva his wife, aged 61, dairy-maid;

Her son-in-law Pavel Kurochkin, aged 51, coachman, groom and blacksmith;

His wife Avdotya, aged 36, milk-maid;

Avdotya Arkhipova, aged 37, poultry-maid;

Dmitri Vassiliev, aged 31, forester, watchman and gardener;  
Praskovya, niece of Old Ulyana living in St. Petersburg,  
formerly employed by A.S. Pushkin as a nurse, aged 18,  
maid of all work;

Nastasya, daughter of Vassili Mikhailov, aged 23, serving-maid in the master's house and the outbuildings;  
 Daughter of Darya Andreyeva, who is now employed in St. Petersburg by Olga Sergeyevna Pushkina, aged seven years.

But what did they look like? Have any pictures of them been preserved? It used to be assumed there were none, but this assumption was a mistaken one. One does exist.

In the spring of 1837, at the request of Alexander Turgenev, M. Vilyegorsky, G. Stroganov and the poet's wife, supported in this project by the governor of Pskov A. Peshchurov, Ilya Ivanov, a Pskov land-surveyor, paid a visit to Mikhailovskoye in order to record for posterity the place where Pushkin had lived and worked. The well-known artist P.A. Alexandrov subsequently made a lithograph from Ivanov's drawing, which was reproduced thousands of times over and is familiar to everyone. The drawing shows the garden and immediate surroundings of the poet's house and outbuildings complete with flower-beds and little paths; Ivanov depicts Pushkin on horseback, his friends the Osipovs riding along in their coach and the old nurse, Arina Rodionovna, standing on the tumble-down porch. Yet there is something else included in the lithograph usually dismissed as a chance group of peasants included to enliven the landscape.

Yet in actual fact here we have an old man with a crooked staff, who is of course Old Ereimei. Then the other seven figures returning home after hay-making with rakes and scythes over their shoulders are none other than the complete staff of serfs: Praskovya, niece of Ulyana, Nastasya Mikhailova, Dmitri Vassiliev and the rest. Finally the little girl with plaits walking along beside the adults is, sure enough, Darya Andreyeva's little daughter.

Thus it emerges that Ivanov's sketch entitled *Village of Mikhailovskoye* depicts not merely Pushkin's estate but also the serfs the poet knew and loved so much, from his old nurse Arina Rodionovna to the little daughter of Darya Andreyeva.

Ilya Ivanov was not an artist but merely a surveyor and draughtsman. Consequently his sketch was distinguished by its precision. The familiar lithograph virtually brings to life the *Inventory of Mikhailovskoye*. We have no other drawings of this historic spot, which renders the sketch unique and priceless.

*"Bringing Before Thee Thine of Thine Own"*

Pushkin had long since looked upon Mikhailovskoye as lost to him. By 1835 his parents had decided to sell the place so as to improve their financial straits. For them Mikhailovskoye was just one of the family estates, a pleasant spot to spend the summer in. For the poet, on the other hand, Mikhailovskoye had been a source of spiritual regeneration and the place where he had found refuge from troubles that beset him. Life to Pushkin was unthinkable without that little village and it was only after long hesitation and endless arguments with his parents, his sister and her husband that Pushkin finally let himself be persuaded that Mikhailovskoye should be sold....

Yet here was Pushkin again in the familiar Mikhailovskoye surroundings. He had come here because his mother had bid him do so as she lay dying. She had been suffering from a painful illness and, knowing that she was dying, had sent for Alexander. She begged him to forgive her for lavishing her affection on his brother and neglecting him throughout her life. This sin was torturing her because her love for Lev had fallen on stony ground. The neglected son was the one who came to her and asked for forgiveness, and together they wept and grieved. Pushkin asked to be forgiven for taking umbrage as the unloved son, for his vain mode of life, comforted his mother with gentle words of kindness which brought far more consolation to the dying woman than any confession, prayers or extreme unction would have done.

When she felt death close at hand, the old lady made Pushkin promise that he would not leave her ashes in Petersburg.

"I know that you are busy, that you have no time," she said. "Yet promise that you will take my body to our estate."

The poet vowed solemnly that he would do as she asked.

Pushkin's mother died in his presence during Easter Week. With her death Pushkin found himself burdened with a large number of formalities. A coffin, priests, the funeral service, bureaucratic niceties in order to obtain permission to take the dead woman's body out of St. Petersburg. All this had to be seen to and it was money, money all the way that was required and that had to be borrowed at any price, regardless of the rate of interest.

But at last everything was over and Pushkin was able to start on his way.... In a shabby coach with seats for four hired at the St. Petersburg main post-office the poet set out taking with him

a coffin in a large wagon specially fitted out to take such sad cargo over long distances.

The party made slow progress. The spring of 1836 was a warm one and the road was barely passable. Beyond Luga it disappeared altogether in the spring floods. To break their journey and stop over near wayside houses and taverns was something the poet felt awkward about, and what was more it was not allowed according to the special regulations applicable to the transport of bodies to their resting-place. The regulations only allowed stops near churches, which explains why Pushkin spent nights at Gatchina, Luga, Krasnopolye, Pskov and Ostrov. Each time he stopped a requiem service had to be sung.

It seemed they would never reach their destination. Pushkin was bruised all over after the never-ending bumps and ruts in the road. He also felt dizzy from all the incense and mournful chanting in the churches. Indeed, he felt ill beyond words.

On arriving in Pskov Pushkin was planning to go and visit the city governor, Alexei Peshchurov, the kindest of souls, but after imagining to himself the inevitable questions that would be showered upon him and the stereotyped words of condolence, he decided against such a step. Instead he merely went into the shop of a certain Lapin, gave instructions for the drivers to be given some vodka, while he himself went to the bishop's house to have his travelling permit signed and make arrangements to have another requiem sung.

It was not until dawn on the fourth day that Pushkin reached the Svyatogorsky Monastery. Not even the monastery had started its activities for the new day yet. Interminably long and angry knocking was required before the porter came to let them in. By this time Pushkin was so angry that he had difficulty in stopping himself hitting the man's sleepy face into the middle of next week. The porter ran to fetch the Father Superior and the latter soon appeared: he glanced through Pushkin's papers, fingering the large seal that looked like a copper, five-kopek piece, and asked: "Which service do you want celebrated, Sir?"

"What do you mean, which service! ?"

"I am asking whether you want the simple service or the more ceremonial office? Do you want the service to be conducted in the main church, with a full complement of candles and a choir? Or just the simple service?"

"Oh, I want things done the proper way," Pushkin replied absent-mindedly, anxious to be done with all formalities. The Father Superior turned to the porter and gave instructions for

the funeral cavalcade to be let in, the coffin to be carried into the upper church, and for candles and icon-lamps to be lit.

Pushkin asked the Father Superior to send one of his novices to Mikhailovskoye to instruct the village elder to send some men to the monastery straightaway to start digging the grave.

It was the last day of Easter Week — the most festive of the whole year. The monastery bells rang out with their lively Easter peals. The faithful started to assemble, for the most part tipsy. During that week, in accordance with an old Russian custom, all sinners and the sinless alike were at liberty to indulge in the pleasures of this life: eat, drink and be merry! ... Pushkin alone was in a gloomy state. Merry spirits were something that had deserted him long ago, and he now found it difficult even to imagine what he was like in a merry mood.

The poet walked out into the monastery grounds. He stood for a while near the porch of the lower wooden Church of St. Nicholas where there hung a picture illustrating the transient brevity of this earthly life, complete with doggerel composed by the Father Superior, Iona. This picture that he still remembered from ten years ago showed earth and heaven, the sun and the moon and a round clock that served as a reminder of time's quick passage, and implacable Death armed with a scythe and pointing with a bony hand towards the clock. Beneath the clock was a large crooked pine-tree on which the artist had attached a scroll bearing the following words:

O, Mortal, look, mark, learn, and inwardly digest,  
How swiftly thy life flies, how soon thou'lt meet with Death!  
Prepare each hour, with bitter tears and rueing,  
Lest Death should take thy soul in its ill-doing.  
Inexorable Death will never linger  
But points how brief our span with warning finger...  
The hours and times and years pass in a wink  
While we, like to the Sun, from East to West do sink.  
Come, man, and with enlightened faith and meek,  
Come, enter in God's house thy humble prayer to speak,  
And whilst right zealously thy prayers arise  
Look on these lines with moved and heartfelt sighs.

Memories started flooding back. This was the grave of Pimen, one of the first superiors at the monastery. It was here that Pushkin had first visualised his Tsar Boris\*.... Yes, here

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\* i.e., Boris Godunov, hero of the historical drama which Pushkin wrote in 1825.—Ed.

were the monastery walls, here was the cell where in the past he had spent hour upon hour in edifying conversation with his spiritual mentor, Father Superior Iona. Here was the cell of his friend, the monk Vassili, that splendid and quite incredible rogue exiled from the capital, the monastery librarian and archivist, thanks to whom the poet had realised that the devil is often not so black as he is painted...

Where was everyone? It was all past history now. Iona and Father Vassili were no longer among the living. The monks were new and the novices likewise, and indeed, Pushkin himself was a changed man now...

Pushkin made his way up to the top of the hill, counting the stone steps as he went. There were thirty-seven and that reminded the poet that he, too, would soon be thirty-seven.... How strange! Then the poet went over to the family cemetery. He greeted the peasants, sat down on a bench and watched the gay abandon with which they were throwing up spadefuls of gold sand from the grave they were digging.

Yet what a fine place this really was! High up, dry, the trees rustling and no meaningless bustle. There was the fine old white church, and the road down which he had often walked on his way to the ancient monastery. This is the right place for me, not swinish Petersburg, here and nowhere else. "Bringing before thee thine of thine own." But how do you go about it making sure of a place in the family cemetery?

Pushkin could not shake off this thought, and the whole day he was haunted by the words from the ancient canon: "Bringing before Thee Thine of Thine own in all and for all."

The poet's mother was buried at two o'clock in the afternoon, and after the ceremony Pushkin left for Mikhailovskoye. He spent a long time walking about the house and peering at the things that stood there as if he was looking for something. Then he shut himself away in his study and went to bed immediately without giving any orders to any of the servants. The next morning he called for a horse to be saddled and once more set off for the Svyatogorsky Monastery. When he had only gone halfway he had the horse taken back while he himself continued on foot: he always found it easier to think when walking along. After going in through the gate of the monastery Pushkin walked up the slope to his mother's resting-place. The grave was already covered with turf. Some kind attentive soul had decorated the grave with snowdrops and springs of pussy-willow. At the end of the grave there stood a

simple cross of pine-wood. An inscription still had to be composed. But why should he, Pushin, do it? His father would write it. He was a past master at epitaphs.

It had grown very quiet. Easter Week was at an end. There was not a soul around—no peasants talking about the master turning up at Mikhailovskoye, no monks who the evening before had had every opportunity of scrutinising the famous moor.... The thoughts about his own tomb that had occurred to him the day before had now taken concrete shape in the poet's mind: "Here lies Pushkin. This is where Pushkin must lie. Here at this spot and nowhere else."

With agonising clarity the thought came to him that Pushkin no longer existed. He is irrevocably dead like the people lying over there at the foot of the hill.... No! I don't want that.... After all, what is death? For men's deeds are not measured only in terms of their earthly lives! ... Once again the thought concerning his last journey, of his own grave at home here in Mikhailovskoye floated to the surface. "Bringing before Thee Thine of Thine Own."

How sad that Voynych was not at his side. He had experience in everything, knew how to manage any situation. Pushkin began to compose a letter to Nashchokin in his mind: "Voynych, my dear friend, you are plagued with illness but give no thought to the possibility that you could die. I have to think about all that for you. The question of a cemetery is no idle matter, but on the contrary, a most important one. Well, you know my friend, you would be most unlikely to find a better cemetery anywhere than that in my village near Pskov. The earth is so fine, it's more like a featherbed. Then the view, the vistas are a miracle to behold.... When my time comes I shall leave instructions for my body to be buried here next to yours, I give you my word of honour! ..."

On the evening of that day, the last before the poet returned to St. Petersburg, Pushkin paid money into the monastery coffer to make sure of a plot of earth when death should overtake him. In the ledgers where details of monasterial revenues and expenses for 1836 are kept the Father Superior made the following entry: "Received from A.S. Pushkin ten roubles for a place in the cemetery. A contribution to monastery funds was also made by the aforesaid gentleman in the form of a bronze candlestick decorated with malachite, and an icon of the Mother of God with a silver framework and encrusted with pearls."



These belongings Pushkin had taken with him from the house at Mikhailovskoye. He knew that he would not be coming back there again. For Pushkin Mikhailovskoye was already part of yesterday. It did not exist for him any more. All that was left were memories, and tomorrow perhaps there would not even be a trace of those.

*Professor and Farm-Worker Recite from  
the Seventh Chapter of "Eugene Onegin"  
at Mikhailovskoye*

Each year on the first Sunday of June, the people of Pskov and large numbers of visitors from everywhere under the sun gather at the PUSHkin estate in Mikhailovskoye. This fine tradition has been kept up ever since 1924, when the centenary of Pushkin's arrival at Mikhailovskoye, for his period of exile, was celebrated.

On that occasion leading writers, artists and scholars gathered together. The then President of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Alexander Karpinsky suggested that an annual festival be held there to mark the poet's burthday. "These festivals," he pointed out, "should be festivals of poetry and friendship between the peoples."

This proposal bore fruit, and as Irakli Andronikov was to write: "There has been nothing like it before in our country. Nowhere has such a large number of guests been welcomed in any one place all at once. The number of guests is all the more surprising in view of the fact that none of them are specially invited. They make their own way to Pushkin, because they feel they have to come."

For a good many years now Pskov country has abounded with a wealth of books by and about Pushkin. Before the war each of the forty schools in Pskov District and each village club had a collection of Pushkin books. Pushkin's works were also to be found in the private libraries of many farm cottages.

At Pushkin Hills a first-class public library was set up by a special team of experts from the Academy of Sciences and the Leningrad City Library. It numbered close on ten thousand books on Pushkin and his times and the poet's own works. Here you could find works by leading Russian poets, writers, critics, autographed copies of works by Korolenko, Koni, Maikov, Gorky, Lev Tolstoi. Each writer or artist who visited Mikhailovskoye regarded it as a point of honour to donate a book to the library there.

But then came the war. Everything was destroyed by the nazis. Driven by a fierce hatred of Russia and the Soviet people they attempted to wipe out Russian culture and the very name of Pushkin from the face of the earth. Yet Pushkin proved invincible. All that was linked with the name of Pushkin was brought back to life again as soon as the war was over and the enemy had been driven out of the country.

The Pushkin estate was brought back to life as well.

At the time of liberation Mikhailovskoye was little more than a sorry ruin. The roads and lanes on the estate were so encumbered as to be impassable. Everywhere there were but craters and other litter of war. Gaunt chimneys were all that was left of the villages. At the "boundary of the ancestral home" were overturned exploded tanks and cannon. Along the bank of the Sorot River were the blasted remains of German reinforced pill-boxes. And everywhere there were row upon row of barbed wire and notice-boards saying: *Beware of Mines, No Through Road, Caution!*

There were few people around in those days apart from soldiers busy clearing the fields, woods and meadows of mines. From time to time loud explosions would rend the air.

In the gardens of Mikhailovskoye former inhabitants of the surrounding villages were soon to make for themselves a temporary camp in the former Nazi dug-outs and bunkers. They took the dug-outs to pieces and used the logs to build new huts in place of the old ones which had been burnt down. In a large clearing near the entrance to the estate a camp was set up for soldiers, whose primary task was to clear the Pushkin estate of explosives. At times it seemed as if the war was still going on. But no, the expressions on people's faces were full of calm joy and everyone was eager to build up again all that had been destroyed but that they were determined to resurrect.

Preparations for the first post-war Pushkin Festival in 1945 were particularly enthusiastic. The tradition that the war had interrupted could now continue. The atmosphere was one of excitement, although we were all very poor in those days and almost each one of us had suffered personal bereavement. Everyone worked hard to put their own gardens and Pushkin's in order for the occasion.

On the morning of June 6th some ten thousand people gathered at Mikhailovskoye. There was not a horse or car in sight though, everyone had come on foot, some people had covered a distance of up to thirty miles. There were many cripples and war-veterans among the crowd. It was like a rally of

those who had survived the Nazi invasion. On a make-shift arch hung an improvised portrait of Pushkin with an inscription on a red calico ground that read: *Welcome Pushkin!* In the centre of the main clearing where the army field kitchen had been set up visitors could avail themselves of tea. Tea with sugar what was more! On Kern Avenue portraits of Pushkin were on sale and books on Mikhailovskoye that had just been printed for the occasion in Pskov.

Among the guests at that particular Pushkin Festival was a well-known scholar from Leningrad University, the late Professor Vladislav Evgeniev-Maximov, a fervent devotee of Pushkin and an inspired speaker. On hearing that the traditional Pushkin Festival was to take place as usual, the professor decided that despite his advanced age and disregarding the advice of his relatives, it was his duty to attend, indeed an honour.

At that time the journey to Mikhailovskoye was a real adventure. The train journey from Leningrad to Pskov took almost forty-eight hours. From Pskov to Pushkin Hills the journey had to be made on horseback or on passing army lorries and then only as far as the river Velikaya near the village of Selikhново. There was no bridge across the river for it had been blown up and anyone who wanted to get any further in the direction of Novorzhev or Pushkin Hills had to cross that river on a makeshift raft.

All this was in store for the valiant old professor as well and by the time he eventually arrived at his destination he was much the worse for wear.

At last the proceedings were opened. Evgeniev-Maximov took the floor. He delivered a moving speech about Pushkin's greatness, his patriotism and the way in which Pushkin had helped our fighting men rout the invaders during the war years. In the course of his speech the Professor quoted a passage from the seventh verse of the seventh chapter of *Eugene Onegin*.

At times above that humble urn  
The early wind would softly breathe  
And through the dangling pine-boughs yearn  
And sway the uninscribed wreath.

When he came to the words:

And by the grave, their arms entwined,  
By moonlight they would stand and weep,

he forgot how the passage continued and an awkward silence fell. Then all of a sudden one of the audience, a tall, bearded

old man rose to his feet and came to the rescue with the lines that had slipped the professor's memory:

But now... the mournful monument  
Is quite forgot. The path is now  
Unused. No wreath hangs from the bough;  
Alone beneath it, grey and bent,  
The shepherd sits and sings again  
- And weaves bast shoes for countrymen.

The professor did not interrupt the old man but respectfully listened to him reciting the verse to the end. At the end of his address an astonished Evgeniev-Maximov came up to the stranger and, greeting him with a grateful hug, suggested they sit down a little to one side of the crowd and have a talk.

"Tell me, my dear fellow, who are you, what are you and where do you hail from?"

The old man replied that his name was Antonov, that he lived locally in the village of Avdashi and had been working at the local collective farm ever since it had first been set up in 1929. Then it emerged that the old peasant knew by heart not only the seventh chapter of *Eugene Onegin*, but the whole work from start to finish. He told the professor that in his youth he had even tried his hand at writing verse himself, but had got over that and started reading Pushkin....

"However terrible life was under the Germans I always had my book of Pushkin with me. I had bought it here at Mikhailovskoye a good forty years ago. For me and my family it was one of our rare comforts in those grim years."

\* \* \*

This story of the peasant Pushkin-lover I was later to tell to Sergei Vavilov, the then President of the Academy of Sciences when I submitted my next report on the progress of restoration work at the Pushkin Museum. Vavilov at once asked his secretary to bring him a one-volume edition of Pushkin.

Before handing me the book to give to old Antonov, the Academy President wrote the following dedication in it: "To dear Comrade Antonov in memory of the 146th anniversary of Pushkin's birth celebrated at Mikhailovskoye, wishing you a long and happy life,

"Gratefully yours,  
"Sergei Vavilov."

*Guardian of Mikhailovskoye*

Pushkin's house in Mikhailovskoye although it is a museum still has a life of its own. It radiates warmth and light and is most welcoming. The rooms are always filled with the scent of mellow wood and fresh earth. When the pines in the nearby copses flower, a cloud of fragrant pollen hovers above the house. When the lilac, jasmine and rose-hip bushes burst into bloom the house is filled with their fragrance. There are always fresh flowers to be found in every corner. Not all of them are in large luxuriant bouquets, as they would have been arranged in the old days, but some simply in small bunches dotted about in inconspicuous places.

Then comes the time for the limes to flower. They fill the house with a scent of wax and honey. The limes grow next to the house and wild bees live in their hollow trunks. Bees also live in the earth in front of the house. Badgers and racoons visit the grounds in September, when the nights grow longer and people sleep longer, and treat themselves to the honey.

In autumn apples from the orchards are brought into the house to be stored. The apples are exquisite and of every possible sort and variety. The scent of apples mingles with the scents of flowers and honey. This makes the rooms seem to radiate a still more inviting warmth.

Inside the house there is evidence of a good deal of white Pskov linen—table-cloths, towels, curtains. Linen has a smell all of its own, cool and heady. When the linen articles in the house become shabby from age they are replaced with fresh ones woven by local weavers on old-fashioned looms.

Linen material possesses a remarkable quality—wherever it lies, it creates a sense of freshness. Scientists maintain that linen keeps a man healthy. People who sleep in coarse linen sheets, wear linen underwear next to their skin or rub themselves down with linen towels hardly ever suffer from colds. Pushkin, too, rarely suffered from such ailments in this house where there was such a rich supply of linen.

Pushkin's serfs, like all those in the Pskov area, were past masters at growing flax, and Pskov linen had been famous throughout Russia and beyond her borders since time immemorial. Two hundred years before Pushkin's time a special English trading company had been set up in Pskov to buy up flax and linen articles to be sent to England.

In those days unbleached linen was used to upholster chairs, couches and armchairs and to make bed curtains. Over

Pushkin's bed there was a curtain of this type as his friend Pushchin recalls.

The rooms that Pushkin once lived in are filled with a smell of cleanliness and sunshine thanks to the linen, the flowers and the apples, even though at the height of the season thousands of people may pass through them in a single day.

\* \* \*

It is a far from simple task to prevent the rooms of a museum house from showing the signs of countless visitors. Very important in this respect is keeping a house as clean as possible and making the most of the fragrance of the gifts of the earth. No less important is who looks after the museum. By no means everyone can take care of a museum properly. This is not an art that can be learnt. Some can outdo any manual of museum research, are regular encyclopaedias, and can explain all the whys and wherefores, yet the past that they should bring alive for us, remains dead and academic, whereas others make everything they so much as touch come to life. It is hard to pinpoint the reason for this, yet there is no denying this all-important gift.

For many years Alexandra Fedorova, a simple peasant woman, was in charge of the domestic running of Mikhailovskoye. She had a real talent for museum work although she had never had any special training. Indeed she only learnt to read when she was middle-aged and started working at the museum. It was then that she realised that to work in Pushkin's house without being able to read was out of the question, because her work involved not merely looking after the house and devoting herself to its care, but also understanding it and those who came to visit Pushkin.

Nature endowed Alexandra Fedorova with a gift for bringing to life all she touched. Her touch transformed and imparted new life to everything around her: she used to keep a careful watch over the grounds, make sure that all was in order in Pushkin's rooms and always knew where everything was. Her simple words used to fill the rest of us with joy. On occasions her kind lips were to utter reproaches when any of us learned characters might forget to put back the cover protecting some Pushkin relic or absent-mindedly light up a cigarette in a place where smoking was not allowed. Nothing used to escape her eagle eye. In the mornings, after putting things in order for the day, Alexandra Fedorova liked to sit in the customary pose of

the Russian peasant woman by the window of the most hallowed of all the rooms—Pushkin's study—and busy herself with some needlework or other. More than likely, Pushkin's old nurse Arina Rodionovna used to sit at that window engrossed in some similar occupation. Sometimes, while a group of visitors was being taken through the museum, someone would exclaim: "Look—a perfect copy of Arina Rodionovna!" Indeed, there was a resemblance, for Alexandra Fedorova was deeply attached to Pushkin and all that was linked with his memory—his papers, books, belongings: her love for the poet like that of his old nurse had something maternal about it.

Alexandra Fedorova, or Aunt Shura as she was known by the museum staff and visitors to Mikhailovskoye, has always possessed a magic touch. Whether she was putting Pushkin's rooms in order, dusting the furniture, arranging flowers or putting out vases on the various cabinets, tables and chests of drawers, the result was always perfect, and anyone coming to the museum always exclaimed quite involuntarily: "Oh, but how beautiful!" when they took their first peep inside.

During the twenty years Aunt Shura worked at Mikhailovskoye she came to know which light brought out the most in each picture, the best way to clean the mahogany furniture, the bronzes and the mirrors. She never needed any reminders as to what needed rearranging, or when the cornflowers or daisies needed changing. She always noticed what needed doing at once and immediately saw to it.

On one occasion we decided it was important to get hold of an old-fashioned linen curtain for the servants' quarters in Mikhailovskoye, and I mentioned the matter to Aunt Shura.

"Wait a moment and I shall run over to the village beyond the lake, where one of my folks used to live. The war passed them by and you can still find all sorts of old things there."

Before I had time to blink, the good soul had covered the fifty odd miles there and back and brought back to Mikhailovskoye the most beautiful of antiques that are not to be found anywhere nowadays for love or money.

Then another time a collector of old Pskov folk-songs came to Mikhailovskoye and asked me to put her in touch with old inhabitants of the local villages who might remember old folk-songs and still be able to sing them for her to tape.

Once more I turned to Aunt Shura and asked if she knew anyone who could help. Horses were harnessed and the three of us set off for the village of Romashki, where she introduced us to an old man and his wife by the name of Pavlov. The old man

was a treat to behold with his pink face, blue eyes and white beard and so welcoming: in happy excitement he at once climbed onto the sleeping-bench in his cottage and brought out a little chest where he kept his accordion that was trimmed with copper and bore the inscription: "This instrument was fashioned in Novorzhev in 1858 by Razveyev, craftsman for the musical arts."

Then he took up his instrument, sat down on a bench, played a few chords, and then fell silent. The two women sat down next to him, linked hands and moved up close to each other waiting for the old man to give them the signal to begin. At his nod they struck up with the song *Hey, My Fine Young Man*, a rare old wedding song of the Pskov country which long ago would have been sung to bridegrooms on the eve of their wedding-day:

Hey, my fine young man,  
Where did you ride and walk,  
Where did God guide your steps?  
Hey, sweet maid, I rode  
From town to town.  
Hey, sweet maid, I sought,  
I sought myself a bride,  
I sought myself a blooming bride and young.  
A bride indeed I found, but now with her I know  
Neither content, nor any joy at all.

The old women explained to us that for this particular song one person would sing the words while another would sing another part but without words.

After this the old women got into their stride, and we were able to record some wonderful traditional songs.

I shall always remember how Alexandra Fedorova helped us collect together traditional ornaments, furniture and hangings for the newly restored cottage, which at one time had housed the estate office, the kitchen and the granaries. In the winter, in thirty degrees of frost she and I sat off to visit neighbouring villages to look for pieces of traditional embroidery, hand-woven fabrics, peasant dresses, crockery. I remember how frozen we were, how we almost fell through the ice when we were crossing the river Sinyaya to reach the village of Sinsk, where Pushkin had once spent the night.

Aunt Shura was a most attentive listener when we told the visitors about Pushkin, his life in the country, the friends who



came to visit him at Mikhailovskoye, his loneliness, tears, torments and melancholy.

When any new guide started work at the museum or a student came to Mikhailovskoye for his practicals, they always made a point of asking Aunt Shura to listen to them showing people round and give them her comments. The old woman would listen most carefully and hardly ever made a mistake when assessing their competence.

On Mondays the Pushkin house is closed to the public. That day is set aside for major cleaning operations. Although this fact is noted in all reference manuals and guide-books, nevertheless visitors still turn up and ask to be shown round. If they asked nicely the old woman was bound to let them have their way and show them into the museum after all, reminding them as she did so: "I have just tidied up, scrubbed and waxed the floors so please take your boots off before you have a quick look round." Everyone obediently doffed their boots and came quietly into the hallowed rooms as if they were entering a church.

Aunt Shura was a past master at making time stand still. When she spoke about the house it was as if she was reading from the scriptures. As she led the visitors through the rooms of the museum the visitors would be hearing something far more interesting than any guide's potted history—a folk tale about Pushkin. Without any preamble, Aunt Shura would launch straight into her story: "This was where Pushkin lived in torment for two years and a month. Here all is his. Though you cannot see him now, he sees all, who comes here and why they come, who comes with a good heart, who comes to learn, and who comes just to admire himself in the mirror and bathe in the river. Pushkin loved everything that has life and wrote about it all in his books. Today everyone comes to Pushkin, because his works shield us from evil and cleanse our souls. His house does for the people of today what a church did for them in the past. If your heart is troubled and you have no one to turn for advice, come to Pushkin: he will help you understand who is your true friend and hold you back from a false step—his advice will set you on the right path and bring you joy and happiness. Just you think carefully what you need and then ask Pushkin for help, and you will find the answers to all your questions in his books...."

In the room that belonged to Pushkin's old nurse she used to recite to visitors Arina Rodionovna's letters to the poet written in Mikhailovskoye. In Aunt Shura's rendering these

letters were particularly appealing, indeed they seemed more like her letters than someone else's: "For all your kind favours we thank you from the bottom of our hearts, you are with us always in our thoughts."

Aunt Shura, like Pushkin's old nurse, exemplified all the finest traits of an old Russian peasant woman, kindness, an open heart and warm love for her fellow-creatures. In age, and indeed appearance as well, the two women had a good deal in common, if we go by Arina Rodionovna's portrait carved in bone by the artist Seryakov in the forties of the last century. Both of them had slightly upturned noses, firm mouths and deep wrinkles. They both used to wear sleeveless fur jackets and head-scarves.

Alexandra Fedorova was one of a long line of Pskov peasants. She herself had been born quite near the Pushkin estate in the village of Nosovo on the other side of the Sorot River. Her grandparents had been serfs in Trigor'skoye. When a young girl she had worked as a day-labourer in Trigor'skoye or Mikhailovskoye, wherever there was work to be had in vegetable gardens or orchards. Life was far from kind to Alexandra Fedorova. Her family was very poor. She married young and shortly before the war her husband volunteered for construction work near Leningrad, where she and her daughter went to join him, and they all lived in hostel quarters. When the war came bringing disaster in its wake, she had to make her way back to her native village on foot. Her husband disappeared without trace. The district round her native village was partisan territory, and Alexandra Fedorova helped the freedom-fighters in whatever way she could. Although she did not know one end of a gun from the other and was not sent on reconnaissance work, she did all she could to help provide food for the partisans, until, towards the end of the war, her house was burnt down by the Nazis and she was driven out of her devastated village.

After the war a new chapter in Aunt Shura's life began: she came to work at the Pushkin Museum that became a new home for her in which she was to spend almost twenty years, until, at a ripe old age, she returned to her native village to live out the rest of her days.

After Alexandra Fedorova left Mikhailovskoye, the place was like an abandoned orphan somehow: it was a long time before we could believe that the old woman would be in our midst no more, and that we would no longer hear the gentle voice saying: "Listen to me for a moment, my son...."

When in 1967, a Leningrad newsreel team came down to make a film entitled *The First All-Union Pushkin Poetry Festival at Mikhailovskoye* I advised the director to go to the village of Nosovo and invite Aunt Shura to come and take part. The director brought her back to Mikhailovskoye with him and their work together proved a great success. If you want to hear and see Alexandra Fedorova, try and see this film. You will not regret the effort!

This world is of course full of miracles, and museums are particularly rich in them, for they are indeed custodians of miracles. "Alexandra Fedorova—the custodian of Mikhailovskoye—was a true miracle." These words are not mine but belong to the poet Mikhail Dudin, a frequent and most welcome visitor to Mikhailovskoye. He, like many other writers and artists, knew Aunt Shura well and was very fond of her. His affection for her is aptly expressed in his poem *At Shura's Hands I Look*.

At Shura's hands I look, and wonder,  
 And read her works as in her face.  
 They are like oak-roots, groping under  
 The earth, as rough and stern and tender  
 As she herself, as summer thunder,  
 And all her life is there to trace.  
 Here long experience of great worth  
 In clear, plain characters I've read  
 Deeply engraven: by the earth,  
 By spring-time steam and drought and dearth,  
 By mushrooms, honey, cooking hearth,  
 By fire and fruit and milk and bread.  
 These hands have borne with endless patience  
 All that life offered them to bear:  
 Love's sadness, longing, separation,  
 A mother's pangs and perturbation,  
 And even the mortal desolation  
 Of damp earth in a grave-yard drear.  
 All that these hands have made and done  
 In future years will prosper still,  
 And so will all their works to come,  
 And so the link with times now gone  
 Will hold, so long the thread is spun  
 By their life-giving, sacred skill.

## *Pushkin's Undaunted Neighbours*

Not far from Trigorsskoye between the Sorot and Velikaya Rivers there is a beautiful bend in the river where the banks of the Velikaya widen to form sloping meadow-land on which here and there bushes of broom are to be seen.

Here you will find a small old village that was once part of the township Voronich (a suburb of Pskov), but later incorporated into the Trigorsskoye estate of the Osipov-Wulf family. Now this village is part of the Pushkin collective farm.

For several hundred years on end all the inhabitants bore the surname Egorov. They were all related to each other with various degrees of closeness. The present inhabitants are descendants of old-time Egorovs, but they go by different names nowadays. Moreover, all their names are linked with Pushkin in one way or another. This is how it all happened.

In the Jubilee Year (1937) the rural population was issued with internal passports. When the initial lists were drawn up and the officials concerned started work, they were at a loss what to do—this whole village consisted of nothing but Egorovs. What was more, most of the men were Egor Egorovich Egorovs. How on earth could things be sorted out? The passport officials discussed what should be done with the villagers and suggested that everyone should select a new surname, whatever might take his fancy.

Everyone started asking for the name Pushkin, and a few of the villagers were lucky enough to have their request granted, but by no means everybody. Then all the Egorovs started selecting for themselves names of Pushkin's friends or fellow students at the Lyceum, names that were very much in people's minds at the time because of the jubilee. This gave rise to a whole crop of Pushchins, Nazimovs and Ryleyevs. Eventually a "ban" had to be placed on those names as well. When it came to the turn of one of the old Egorovs and his wife, most of the interesting possibilities had been exhausted. The old man decided to remain a Egorov, but his wife finally settled on a surname which although it had no direct association with Pushkin nevertheless had a romantic ring to it—Duelskaya!

After she had been issued with her passport the old woman set off that very same day to Pushkin Hills where she bought a coloured print of Shestopalov's "*Pushkin's Duel with d'Anthès*" in the local bookshop. She brought it home and nailed it proudly to the wall of her cottage in the same corner where her wedding candles stood side by side with an icon depicting St.

George of Voronich—patron saint of all men of Voronich and the Egorovs.

The old couple had lost count of the years and could no longer remember how old they were, but nevertheless they continued to work on the farm thus earning the respect of the whole community.

Their house stood slightly apart from the rest of the village and was as old as they were. It leant over to one side a fraction but was still perfectly solid. Next to the house there was an ancient wild pear tree whose branches leant against the roof of the house. The branches were so thick that it was difficult to say where the roof ended and the tree began.

Behind the house was a small fruit-garden with apple and cherry trees, a narrow path winding between them. The path led down to a large retting pit, where in the past the whole village had soaked its flax and hemp.

The years went by and nothing changed in the day-to-day pattern of the old people's lives.

Then war came to this quiet little world.... Under enemy occupation life became more terrible than their wildest dreams.... The German soldiers and officers who came were all in a hurry, shouting and dispensing frenzied orders. Everyone was made to chop down trees, move logs, dig trenches, build dug-outs.... There was no let-up in the unending work. Then one day the police arrived and the inevitable SS. Everyone was ordered to leave their houses and move off heaven knows where under army convoy. When the outcasts had made their way to the top of the hill overlooking the village their eyes were met by an enormous bonfire in place of their native village.

They marched on for what seemed an endless train of days and nights until at last the order was given for them to halt and be resettled.

In 1944 an end was put to the fascist horrors, and all the villagers made their way back home again.

The old people did not recognize their home. Everything was changed and seemed to be on a miniature scale. Everything breathed damp, rust and destruction. Their orchard was gone, their house was gone. All that remained of their house was the stove.... Russian stoves are indeed the hardest thing in the world to destroy!

The villagers set to work to dismantle the enemy dug-outs, bunkers and log pill-boxes. There were a good number of them and the Germans had seen to it that they were all well built out of good logs, several layers thick. After all it was first-class

timber they had used from the copses of Mikhailovskoye.

Everyone started to build themselves new houses.

"And what are we going to do?" the old man asked his wife.

"What are we going to do? —the same as everyone else of course," the old woman replied. "We'll build us a new house too. We'll collect up logs and start building. What is there to it, after all?"

God alone knows how these old people contrived to collect up all the logs they needed and heave them into place. Good-hearted neighbours like the Pushkins and Yazykovs did give a helping hand of course....

At the end of a year the house was ready and the old man and his wife took on a new lease of life. So did the old pear tree: new shoots appeared and started to lean down towards the roof.

But one fine day, as the saying goes, sappers came to the village and set up a camp there near the river. Each day they would go out into the fields and examine the earth sod by sod.

Then disaster struck. When the sappers came to the old man's garden their instruments registered iron under the earth and they grew worried. The officer in charge gave instructions for them to dig over the ground and when some of the top layers had been removed a black pit was unearthed that formed a tunnel leading under the ground right up to the old man's new house. The pit was large and there was dynamite all round it. In the middle lay a regular hoard of Nazi shells in a thick coat of dark, smelly grease. The shells were laid out in neat straight rows and there was no end to them.

The sappers went cautiously about their work. A hushed silence fell as the officer thought over what he and his men should do next. He weighed up the situation, took another look, and then summoned the old man.

"Look, Grandad, this is how it is," the officer began. "You see how things have turned out ... but don't take on now, will you? You have my word as a Soviet officer.... We won't leave you in the lurch. My men are a grand lot and can tackle any job. You name it, we've got it—carpenters, first-rate joiners—the lot! We'll take your house apart in a jiffy and move it over there out of harm's way. Then before you can say knife we'll explode all this stuff and the whole thing'll be over. We'll dig over the pit, even the place over and put your house back just as it was. We'll put in it such good shape that it'll look better than ever."

The old man did not say a word by way of reply. He was left speechless.

After covering up what they had unearthed, the officer and soldiers went away promising to come back the next day to carry out the operation.

"Well what are we going to do now?" the old man said to his wife.

"What are we going to do?" the old woman echoed. "There are no two things about it. We'll have to do the job ourselves."

She went back into the garden to the path that led to the retting pit. The old people understood each other at once. Words were hardly necessary.

As soon as the sun started to set, they quietly opened up the hole again and set to work. The moon was bright that night and so there was plenty of light to see by. It was almost as if the moon had joined in their "plot". Carefully they took the shells out of the hole one by one and carried them off down the garden path to the retting pit, where they lowered them into the water. They worked right through the night until they had taken out the last of the shells.

When the sappers turned up the next morning they found the old man sleeping under the pear-tree, like a log.

The officer noticed the well-trodden path leading down to the retting pit, went over to the hole where the shells had been, saw it was quite empty and after that no explanations were required.

Then he went into the hut with the coloured print hanging in the corner showing Pushkin fighting his duel with d'Anthès. The old woman was lying on the bench nearby.

"Granny, come now, Granny!" called the officer.

No answer was forthcoming and so he called again: "Granny!"

"Well, what d'you want?" the old woman whispered back as if she was still asleep and without opening her eyes. "If you've come about the carpenters you can tell them to take the logs out of that hole.... They're splendid logs. My old man's been all miserable because we haven't got a bathhouse and I miss it too. Give us a hand, won't you?"

The officer who had seen plenty of strange things in his time, rose quietly to his feet, turned and crept on tiptoe out into the garden. Feeling quite at a loss he flopped down on the ground to collect his bewildered thoughts.

\* \* \*

I also felt well and truly bewildered when I first heard that story. A real wealth of goodness and readiness to come to grips with hardship are necessary for people to be able to endure such catastrophes in old age. Old people after all are just as fond of life as youngsters are. But for the old people it is far harder to start out again from scratch, especially if the life they had been living before is brought to an unexpected end, earlier than necessary.

May God grant the old man and his wife many good years yet.





## IRAKLI ANDRONIKOV

“People tend to forget that in order to have adventures one must pursue them, and in order to pursue adventure one must be animated by a strong passion or possess one of those restlessly curious natures which are prepared to sacrifice life a thousand times over just to discover the key to an apparently simple riddle, which, in all probability, will yield yet another....” These words by the great Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov seem to presage the appearance, a hundred years later, of just such a restlessly curious scholar, Irakli Andronikov (b. 1908), who was to make an adventure of following up various riddles in his, Lermontov’s life.

Irakli Andronikov occupies a place all of his own in modern literary studies. While occupied in exploration of archive material and textological research, he takes the reader along with him, as it were, on his exciting quest. Irakli Andronikov is the creator of the “literary research story”, which presents hunts in archives as adventures quite on a par with the gold-digging in Jack London’s Klondike stories.

An actor and author, historian and critic, Doctor of Philology Irakli Andronikov enjoys enormous popularity in the Soviet Union as the author of fascinating studies of Pushkin, Lermontov and many other Russian poets, musicians and artists and as a stage and television personality.







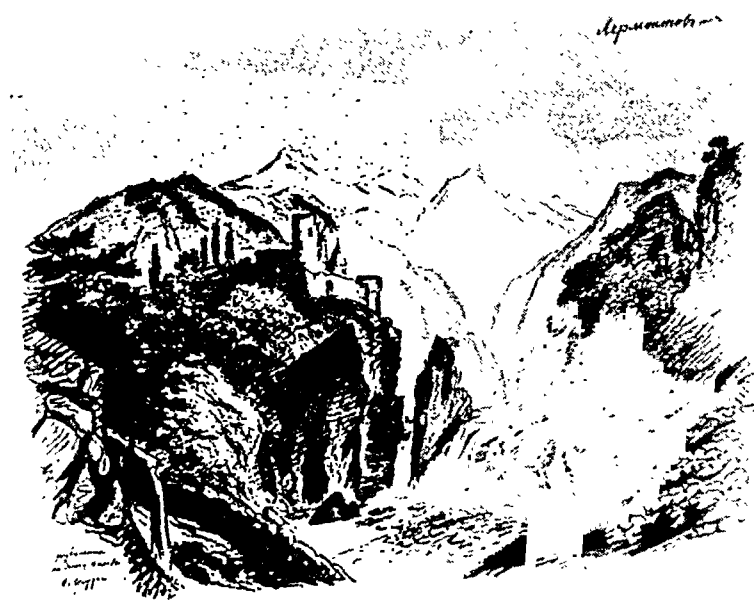
Mikhail Lermontov. Oils



Natalia Ivanova. Pencil drawing by V. Binneman



Red Square in Moscow. By Kadul. 1825







## *THE N.F.I. RIDDLE*

So—I may not pronounce your name.  
To write it, even, is forbidden.  
At its' familiar sounds a hidden  
And half-quenched grief leaps into flame.  
Judge then yourself ... how hard it is  
To hear that name on other's lips.

*M. Lermontov*

### *The Mysterious Initials*

An involved and unusually fascinating task happened to come my way once. I was living in Leningrad at the time helping to prepare a new edition of Lermontov's complete works, and I was called upon to elucidate to whom Lermontov had dedicated a number of his poems written in 1830 and 1831.

These poems, written when Lermontov was a mere seventeen, are addressed to a girl, whose actual name is never mentioned, not once. In the titles of the poems dedicated to her, instead of a name, all we find are three initials: N.F.I.

On reading these poems we learn that Lermontov was in love with the girl concerned for a long period and that his feelings were unrequited. She, for her part, appears to have loved Lermontov at first but later to have been carried away by someone else and forgotten him. The spurned and lamenting poet addressed the following bitter reproach to his beloved:

It may be I deserve not well  
Your love: that's not for me to tell;  
But you have shamelessly abused me  
Who was most trusting and most true,  
And I shall always say that you .  
In this have most unjustly used me.  
You are not treacherous as a snake,

But, all too often, new impressions  
 Your eager, fickle fancies take.  
 A pray to transitory passions  
 You dote on many, not on one  
 As yet: but here I find no crumb  
 Of comfort or of consolation.  
 In those days when you favoured me  
 I, happy in my destiny,  
 At parting once did pluck a first  
 Shy kiss from your sweet mouth;  
 But, in the dry steppes of the South,  
 One drop's no cure for thirst.  
 God grant that you again may find  
 That which you scattered on the wind;  
 Yet ... surely, woman cannot ever  
 Love such as mine from mind dismiss,  
 And, in your hour of utmost bliss,  
 The memory will you discover!  
 Conscience will prick you when you hear  
 The base world lend a willing ear  
 To those who curse and mock my name!  
 But you will fear then to defend me  
 Lest once more you incur their blame  
 For the accomplice' aid you lend me.

It would therefore seem that the girl understood Lermontov and was his sincere friend. She had apparently even been blamed for being on the side of the poet.

I do not know why Lermontov never mentioned her name on a single occasion. I do not know why all of Lermontov's biographers without exception failed to solve this riddle. All I do know is that in the next edition of Lermontov's works there is going to be a brief precise footnote to the effect that the name of the woman to whom Lermontov dedicated these particular poems was such and such.

And so I set to work....

### *The Diary in Verse*

Night after night I spent sitting at my desk burning the midnight oil as I pored over a volume of Lermontov's youthful poems. I read each one with meticulous care, comparing individual lines as I went.

In a poem that bears the heading *To\*\*\**, for example, Lermontov writes:

I mind me how once, by an artifice,  
I plucked from your chaste lips a bitter flower  
Whose honey turned to gall—a careless kiss  
Lightly bestowed to ease the parting hour ...

“It’s worth noting,” I thought to myself, “that he uses almost the same words here to describe a farewell kiss as in the poems dedicated to N.F.I. and this poem was written at almost the same time as the others.”

So perhaps this other poem was addressed to N.F.I. as well? Perhaps the three asterisks were also concealing N.F.I.’s identity? If so, that would probably mean that another poem entitled *To\*\*\** was also dedicated to her:

Not you were to blame, but the luck of the game,  
That so soon came the day you betrayed me.

Then again she was most likely also the subject of the poems *Vision*, *Night*, *September 28th*, *Do not hide it! Your tears were shed for him...*, *Stanzas*, *Guest* and many others, for they also treat the themes of love and betrayal. I started reading them through one by one and found myself confronted with a whole diary in verse recording the sequence of events that made up this sad love affair.

Yes, now it was clear that Lermontov had dedicated to the elusive N.F.I. not four but thirty poems. The one thing that remained to be discovered was her identity and the biggest puzzle of all was how I ought to set about discovering it.

Once more I immersed myself in everything that Lermontov had written during that period.

In the summer of 1831 Lermontov had written a play entitled *The Strange Man*, which tells of the tragic fate of a young poet by the name of Vladimir Arbenin. Arbenin is in love with the enchanting Natalya Fyodorovna Zagorskina. She in her turn loves him, but is later to be carried away by another, forsaking Arbenin and breaking her troth.... At the end of the play Arbenin takes leave of his senses and meets his death on the eve of Natalya Zagorskina’s wedding.

Here in the play, just as in the poems, Lermontov dwells on a betrayal.

“We must part: I love another! I shall set you an example: I shall forget you!” declares Natalya Zagorskina to Arbenin.

“You shall *forget* me? You?” echoes Arbenin plunged in despair, “Don’t you believe it: conscience is more constant than memory; not love but regrets will remind you of me!”

Identical sentiments are to be found in the poem *To N.F.I.*

Conscience will prick you....

It is most striking to note how closely Arbenin's words resemble the sentiments Lermontov addresses to N.F.I. He asks for instance:

When nothing but the rumoured shame  
Of days of passion and mad deeds  
Instead of glory and good name  
Your erstwhile friend behind him leaves,  
And when, at times, he is condemned  
By venomous, ironic tattle:  
Will you have courage to defend  
Him from the cold and heartless rabble?

These lines Arbenin addressed to Zagorskina. Yet I had the feeling that I had read the last four lines somewhere else before, in another of Lermontov's poems.... But how stupid! It had been in the *Romance for I...* that I had come across them!

I compared the two poems and sure enough I was not mistaken! Lermontov had originally incorporated the *Romance for I...* into the rough draft of *The Strange Man* and later changed the opening lines.

This meant that Arbenin dedicated to Natalya Fyodorovna Zagorskina exactly the same lines that Lermontov dedicated to N.F.I. This, in its turn, most likely meant that in *The Strange Man* Lermontov had been describing his own relationship with N.F.I.

"But wait," I thought to myself, "the vital clue must be here.... If Lermontov really was describing his relationship with N.F.I. in *The Strange Man* and Zagorskina's other names were Natalya Fyodorovna, then perhaps the "N.F." in *N.F.I.* signifies Natalya Fyodorovna as well? It stands to reason that Lermontov did not choose this name in his play at random."

I felt that the answer to my riddle was in sight and yet it still eluded me.... So I decided to read all those poems over again.

I turned once more to *The Strange Man*: there on the first page was Lermontov's preface which I had read so many times before. But now for the first time, all of a sudden, I was able to grasp its real implications. Lermontov writes: "I have decided to portray in dramatic terms a true occurrence which disturbed me over a long period and which may well never cease to interest me to the end of my days. The characters depicted here are all drawn from nature and I would wish that they be recognised...."

To think I had not attached any importance to these words before! In his play Lermontov had portrayed real people and events. What was more, he was anxious that they should be recognised. It was as if Lermontov himself was bidding me to find out what N.F.I. stood for and to pinpoint the actual events!

*True Incident on the Banks of the Klyazma*

Pinpoint is easier said than done! How was I to set about it? If the relevant letters from Lermontov's correspondence had been available, things would have been quite different. However, of all the letters Lermontov wrote in 1830 and 1831 only one has been handed down to us. It is a short agitated note addressed to Nikolai Polivanov, a friend of his student days, who had left Moscow to spend the summer in the country. It was written on June 7, 1831 when Lermontov was obviously in a dreadful state.

He writes to Polivanov: "I am now quite out of my mind. I'm ill with tension, and my eyes fill with tears every other moment. I have been through a great deal...."

When informing Polivanov of his cousin's imminent marriage Lermontov pours scorn on all manner of wedding celebrations, writing: "I'm not up to going into details.... No my friend, you and I are not made for society life...."

Vladimir Arbenin might well have penned such a letter. Understandably so since *The Strange Man* and this particular letter were written at the same period: the letter is dated June 7th, while Lermontov completed *The Strange Man* on the evening of July 17th. He must have started work on the play in June, so the play is dealing with the very same events to which Lermontov refers in his letter to Polivanov. Yet Polivanov knew what events the poet was referring to and I did not! The thing to do now was to look at the original for myself. Perhaps I should come across some phrase started only to be crossed out, or an incorrectly deciphered word. You never can tell! But where was I to go for the original?

The original was kept at Pushkin House, and so off I set there. I turned my steps in the direction of the Manuscripts Department and asked to be shown Lermontov's letter to Polivanov. I glanced through it and could not believe my eyes: it appeared that the author of the letter was not Lermontov for a start, but one of his friends, a certain Vladimir Shenshin with

no more than a brief note at the bottom of the page in Lermontov's hand. Shenshin, after informing Polivanov of various pieces of Moscow news, added en passant: "I feel very stifled here and Lermontov, whom I haven't seen for five days (he's been staying in your part of the world, with the Ivanovs), is my only consolation with his interesting conversation...."

Now everything fell into place! Lermontov had been staying with a family by the name of Ivanov at the beginning of June 1831. It was quite on the cards that N.F.I. had been a member of this family—so now we had Natalya Fyodorovna ... Ivanova? !

Shenshin mentioned that he had not seen Lermontov for five days which meant that the Ivanovs could not have lived far from Moscow. This was borne out by the play *The Strange Man*, in which Lermontov has Arbenin travel to the Zagorskins' estate situated on the banks of the River Klyazma, that is, within easy reach of Moscow. It was precisely in that neighbourhood that Lermontov had made a habit of spending his summers with his relatives, the Stolypins on their estate by the name of Serechnikovo. So everything added up!

On June 7, 1831, Lermontov returned to Moscow after his sojourn with the Ivanovs having learned of N.F.I.'s betrayal, and it was then that he began to write *The Strange Man* that tells of this "betrayal". If that was so, then Lermontov's poem entitled *The Eleventh Day of June, 1831* must also have been addressed to the same girl, whom he must have loved so deeply:

When I am dust, amazed society,  
Although it understands them not, will bless  
My dreams; and you will share my immortality,  
My Angel: for my love will surely give  
You life afresh; and you and I shall live:  
Your name and mine, both spoken in one breath...  
For why should they be parted—even in death?

He had been anxious that his name and hers should have been spoken in the same breath. But alas, in order to speak her name I had first to make sure of it, but how?

### *The Forgotten Dramatist*

All well and good! ... Supposing her name had been Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova. But who was she? In what books or

archives could I hope to find information on this elusive personage?

There was no need to worry yet though.... There was Modzalevsky's card index to turn to! This was an unparalleled and extraordinarily complete dictionary of Russian names.

Boris Lvovich Modzalevsky—founder of Pushkin House affiliated to the Academy of Sciences—was a well-known expert on the life and-work of Pushkin. Among other things he made a meticulous study of historical writings, memoirs, journals, official reports, old newspapers, jotting down on cards, as he did so, every single surname that he came across and then adding on that same piece of paper the name and patronymic accompanying it, and the name of the work, volume and page where he had come across the name in question. Thirty years later his card index contained over three hundred thousand entries. The card index consisted of a cupboard made up of wide shallow drawers each containing various compartments crammed with small cards filled out in Modzalevsky's hand. After Modzalevsky's death the card index was purchased by Pushkin House.

If Modzalevsky had come across the name of N.F. Ivanova even once in any book under the sun, he was bound to have written it down on one of his cards and then I should be sure of finding it in his card index.

This time my luck was out, for there was no mention of any Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova in Modzalevsky's card index, which meant that finding even so much as the scantiest information about her would be incredibly difficult. What was more, I did not even know her date of birth.

Zagorskina in *The Strange Man* in supposed to be eighteen years old. If I was to suppose that N.F.I. had been 18 in 1831 that would mean that she had been born in 1813. Then she would have been a year older than Lermontov, which seems to have been the case.

What else was there to be gleaned from the text of *The Strange Man*?

Back I turned to the play. Again I came across an interesting detail. A friend of Arbenin's asks in connection with the Zagorskin family: "There are two sisters, aren't there? And fatherless?"—a question to which Arbenin answers in the affirmative.

If these details in the play were based on fact, then it is highly probable that N.F.I. also had a sister and no father, or, to be more precise, no father in 1831. In 1813 though, when she



had been born, he must have been alive and going by our heroine's patronymic he must have been a Fyodor Ivanov.

In other words I had to find a Fyodor Ivanov who had been alive in 1813 but no longer among the living by 1831. He also had to be the father of two daughters. Although I had precious little to go on in my search for this Ivanov, I had to find him and see whether he could be the father of our elusive Natalya Fyodorovna.

Once again I turned my steps in the direction of Pushkin House. This time I found what I was looking for in Modzalevsky's card index: after looking through all the Ivanovs I found among the Fyodors one who died in 1816, which suited my purposes admirably.

He turned out to be a popular playwright of the early nineteenth century. His full name was Fyodor Fyodorovich Ivanov and he had written a vaudeville, which had been a hit in its day, by the name of *The Starichkov Family*. He had also been a friend of the poets Batyushkov, Vyazemsky and Merzlyakov and famed throughout Moscow for his hospitality, wit and intimate knowledge of the theatre.

While looking through the books from which Modzalevsky had noted the details concerning this particular Ivanov I came across his obituary where I hit upon the following lines: "He has left behind him a desconsolate widow and two enchanting little daughters."

So Ivanov *had* had two daughters of Lermontov's age, who could have been N.F.I. and her sister. Unfortunately, I was still only at the "could-have-been" stage. I had not yet found out anything definite.

### *Vagankovo Cemetery's Secret*

I was aware that I was going about things the wrong way. It was obvious that N.F.I. must have got married at the beginning of the thirties. It was much more likely to find her under her married name than by hunting out details from the biography of her father Fyodor Ivanov, who had died while she was still an infant.

It would be simplest of all to find out information as to whom she had married from family registers. In the family registers of the Russian gentry and nobility each of the men included is complete with number and details as to his date of

birth, place and duration of military or government service, wife, children, medals and titles conferred and date of death. As for the women, the registers record whom they married.

There are hundreds of such family registers in existence, those recording details of princes', counts' and barons' families, and others embracing the lesser echelons of the nobility. The trouble here was that the surname Ivanov was not among those borne by members of the more illustrious nobility and no register of Ivanovs had actually been compiled. This meant that it was impossible to search for a young woman by the name of Ivanova in these registers and thus find out whom she had married.

This meant that I had to start from the other end: my last hope was to find out who among the members of the nobility in the early nineteenth century had married young women by the name of Ivanova.

I took out all the family registers kept in the Pushkin House Library, piled them up round my desk and started searching away. How many bursts of excitement I was to experience during that search that went on day after day and how many bitter disappointments!

"Ivanova. 2nd wife of Prince Meshchersky...." No good, the first name's Helen.

"Ivanova. Lyubov Alexyevna, wife of collegiate registrar Bartenev...." No good.

"Ivanova. Wife of Staff-captain Kulnev...." But that one was a Glafira Ilyinichna, so the names didn't match. No good, again.

"Ivanova Natalya Fyodorovna, wife..."

My heart missed a beat and I hardly dared read on. Whose wife was it going to be? My finger at that moment was half way down the family register of the Obreskovs. Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova was listed there as wife of one Nikolai Mikhailovich Obreskov, of whom it was also noted that this particular lieutenant had lost his commission and nobility status in 1826 on account of an "action unworthy of the name of officer". In 1833 he was dismissed from the army as a mere ensign and was employed in government service from 1836.

I was even able to learn that he was later reinstated as a member of the hereditary nobility and that by the end of the 1850s he had reached the rank of court counsellor.

Well, I thought to myself, now I really am going to solve my riddle! Now I would look through all the Obreskovs in Modzalevsky's card index and should be able to discover all the necessary details relating to the fate of N.F.I.

So from the reading room I went back to the Manuscripts Department of Pushkin House.

Yet another hunt in Modzalevsky's card index revealed Obreskov's father, a lieutenant-general, and his brother, an envoy in Turin. These two Obreskovs Modzalevsky had come across but there was no mention of any Nikolai Mikhailovich. This meant that Modzalevsky had never encountered his name in print on a single occasion. This was all the more surprising, given that Obreskov had lost his commission in 1826 when the trial of all those implicated in the Decembrist Uprising of 1825 had only just finished. In fact, it had even crossed my mind that Obreskov might have been implicated in those events.

To make sure, I turned to the *Alphabetical Index of Decembrists* but still no Obreskov!

This meant that N.F.I. married a man of whom almost as little was known as about herself. There did not seem to be any more leads to follow.

Yet there was one more line of action that I could take.

I had so far not been able to discover anything about Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova, but this did not mean that I should necessarily fail to discover anything about Natalya Fyodorovna Obreskova.

Admittedly there was no such name to be found in Modzalevsky's card index, but perhaps I might be able to hunt something out in some civil service directory which Modzalevsky had not bothered to write up.

Once again I plunged into pile upon pile of name indexes and directories. Nor did I leave obituaries unexplored.

Records of deaths and burials provided me with cemetery addresses so to speak, the only difference being that instead of streets and house numbers I was working with tombstones and memorial tablets. After the name of each person buried would come a detailed record of all that was written on the tombstone or monument of the person concerned: the dates of birth and death, inscriptions, verses etc. At the late nineteenth and early twentieth century detailed registers of St. Petersburg, Moscow and some provincial cemeteries were published and indeed even registers of Russian graves to be found abroad.

When I opened the second volume of the *Moscow Necropolis* and looked under the letter "O"—what should I find but a whole page of Obreskovs!

Yekaterina, Marina, Natalya Alexandrovna and at last....

Natalya Fyodorovna Obreskova. She had died on January

20, 1875 at the age of sixty-two, and was buried in Vagankovo Cemetery!

If she had been sixty-two in 1875 that meant she must have been born, as I had supposed, in 1813. So I *had* fitted the patchwork together right!

And then I realised that in actual fact I had not really found anything out.

What if the initials N.F.I. did stand for Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova? What benefit would that knowledge bring to the reader? What secrets in Lermontov's poetry would that open up for him? What emotional or rational chords would that strike?

I realised that my search still had a long way to go.

Seeing there was by now absolutely nothing more that I could hope to discover from written sources and that Lermontov had met Natalya Ivanova in Moscow I set off for the capital.

### *My Guide to the Moscow of Yesteryear*

Moscow used to boast an amazing little old man by the name of Nikolai Petrovich Chulkov: he was a historian and literary critic, who knew his way about state and family archives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries blindfold, the leading specialist in Russian social history and a veritable wizard when it came to verifying official and private connections between great and not so great Russians of the past. He could be relied upon to tell you when who was born, who lived where, who served in which government departments and regiments, who was married to whom, who paid calls on whom, whose house had stood where and who had died where. More often than not Nikolai Petrovich would give you the information from memory.

He had known old Moscow so well that when the first line of the Metro was built he was turned to for advice. He was the one man who knew where there had been deep cellars and old disused wells in the neighbourhood of Ostozhenka Street (now Metrostroyevskaya Street) that might have hindered the construction workers.

The old man led the construction commission along Ostozhenka Street and the sideroads leading off it, pointing out with his walking stick where the former residences of the nobility had stood and explaining in which corner of the gardens the cellars and wells had been.

Like all people deeply in love with their profession, Nikolai Chulkov was always ready to share his knowledge with other people, whoever might have need of it and he was never concerned as to whether there would be any official acknowledgement.

During the last years of his life Nikolai Petrovich worked at the archives of the State Literary Museum in Moscow. At the time I was not personally acquainted with him but, having heard of his rare generosity and responsiveness I had every hope he would help me.

So I went to the Literary Museum and sent word to Chulkov asking him to be so kind as to come out and speak to me in the entrance hall.

A few minutes later out tripped a tiny little old man with a vestige of a grey moustache; he was most appealing and courteous, and his little eyes kept peering hard as he spoke, as if he was constantly afraid of missing some vital expression on the face of his interlocutor or failing to catch a word of the conversation.

I introduced myself and gave a short account of the search in which I had been engaged. Chulkov listened carefully to what I had to say blinking occasionally as I went on. At last I came to the end, and then it was my turn to listen and blink, this time in astonishment.

"You're quite right," said Nikolai Petrovich in a quiet voice clearing his throat now and then. "Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova was indeed the daughter of Fyodor Fyodorovich Ivanov the well-known Moscow playwright. It is also quite correct that she married Nikolai Mikhailovich Obreskov. And now note this down: the Obreskovs had a daughter Natalya Nikolayevna who in the sixties married Sergei Vladimirovich Golitsyn. The Golitsyns in their turn had three daughters: Alexandra Sergeyevna whose married name was Spechinskaya, Natalya Sergeyevna who married a Maklakov and Khristina Sergeyevna who married an Arsenyev. I was personally acquainted with Natalya Nikolayevna, Ivanova's daughter, and have even been to her house. You are only just too late to go and talk to her about her mother. Natalya Nikolayevna died only recently, in 1924. As well as her I also knew one of her daughters, Khristina Sergeyevna Arsenyeva. I have been to her house as well. She used to live not far from here near the Cathedral of Christ our Saviour. But the cathedral ..." here Nikolai Petrovich faltered

for a moment as he groped for an appropriate word, "...the cathedral and the little house near it were cleared for reconstruction purposes ... and neither stands today. This is why I haven't the slightest idea where Khristina Sergeyevna might be residing at the present time. That's all I can tell you in connection with your task." Nikolai Petrovich then gave another little cough and started rubbing his hands in a rather awkward fashion before going on to say, "In connection with what you told me one question arises that puzzles me. Although I was fairly closely acquainted with both Natalya Fyodorovna's daughter and granddaughter I have never heard either of them mention the name of Lermontov, although they must have realised that his acquaintance with Natalya Fyodorovna would have been of interest to me. This is why I have my doubts as to whether Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova actually was the N.F.I. Lermontov refers to. But of course the first thing you must do now is to look out Khristina Sergeyevna...."

"But where am I to find her?" I asked in a hollow voice, Chulkov having taken the breath out of me with his last remark.

"You ought to be able to obtain the address at the local address bureau," Chulkov said.

"Oh, yes, the address bureau!"

After thanking Nikolai Petrovich I rushed out of the museum.

"A new disaster," I thought to myself. "I've got the wrong N.F.I.!"

I ran to the address bureau, handed in at the inquiries desk a long narrow form that I had filled in with the necessary details concerning Khristina Sergeyevna and waited for my reply.

At last someone asked: "Who was looking up Arsenyeva?"

I ran up to the counter, only to be told: "The Arsenyeva you're looking for does not live in Moscow."

"What d'you mean, 'does not live in Moscow'?"

"Precisely that! She's probably left town. We have no information on such a person."

I turned my dejected steps homeward and thought that I might just as well abandon the search after that for there was no knowing when it would end. Where was I to start looking for Khristina Sergeyevna? What if she had gone to some quite different part of Russia—the Urals, the Caucasus, Kamchatka? What was I to do, just get up and follow?

I knew that was exactly what I was going to do if it actually came to it....

*Distant Relatives*

Khristina Sergeyevna—née Golitsyna. Arsenyeva was only her married name, which meant that I might be able to find out more about her from one of the Golitsyns.

I remembered having heard that Nikolai Vladimirovich Golitsyn worked on the staff of the journal *Revue de Moscou* translating articles from Russian into French.

So I went to see him. I rushed up to the first person I saw as I went into the editorial office and the words came flooding forth before I could sort them out: "Lermontov, N.F.I., she was an Ivanova and married an Obreskov...."

Before I managed to come out with it all I saw a tall elderly man with a wide beard get up from his desk at the far end of the room.

"It must be me this gentleman is looking for!" he explained to his colleagues in surprised tones.

Once more I started out on the tale of my misadventures. "I am happy to be of assistance and will tell you all I know," Golitsyn began, pensively fingering his beard as he spoke. "Alexandra, Natalya and Khristina Sergeyevna are my cousins. I cannot be sure whether they were third or fourth cousins. There was a time when I used to see a good deal of them but that was a long way back. All I can remember about them now is that in their youth they were excellent dancers. As for Alexandra and Natalya Sergeyevna I can tell you nothing, I have had no news of them for some time. With regard to Khristina Sergeyevna though I have more concrete information. She is dead. The latter part of her life she spent in some Moscow suburb.... You may be right in assuming that she might well have had a bundle of old letters or some keepsake of her grandmother. The simplest way to find out would have been to ask her husband Nikolai Vassilievich Arsenyev, but he unfortunately is also dead. Ivan Vassilievich, his brother who must also have known her address is dead too. Just a minute, the person, who *might* know, would be Ivan Vassilievich Arsenyev's son Sergei Ivanovich. As far as I know he is still alive and lives here in Moscow. So the best thing for you to do now is to go and see him, since he is the son of the late brother of the late husband of the late Khristina Sergeyevna. I cannot tell you his address, but most probably you can find out in the address bureau...."

Back I rushed to the address bureau. My next port of call was Sergei Ivanovich's house in Obydensky Street and in the half-light of a small hallway I was met by an old woman who

turned out to be Arsenyev's mother-in-law. She went out of her way to find out as much as she could from me while giving away as little as possible herself. After finding out all she was able, she went on to give me copious advice as to what I should do next and very much to the point it was, too. She began by telling me that despite his advanced years Sergei Ivanovich had been granted permission to embark on a second university degree course because in his youth he had chosen a profession he had been unable to put his heart into. He was a busy man, she went on, rarely to be found at home and it would be most difficult for me to catch him.

"There's no point in your trying to get hold of Sergei Ivanovich," the old woman explained. "He wouldn't be able to tell you anything, nor will Khristina's address get you anywhere. The best thing would be to go and see her sister Natalya Sergeyevna."

I was thunderstruck and gasped: "Which Natalya Sergeyevna?"

"What d'you mean 'which Natalya Sergeyevna'? Maklakova."

"D'you mean to say Maklakova's alive?"

"Of course she's alive, if I bumped into her in a cash-desk queue last week!"

"What cash-desk queue?"

"In the grocer's round the corner. I said 'Hallo', but then we each went our separate ways."

"Where does Natalya Maklakova live?"

"Round here somewhere, on Zubovsky Boulevard, I think."

"What number?"

"I don't know the number of the house. I was never invited there. Go round to the address bureau."

### *The House in Zubovsky Boulevard*

Once more I rushed round to the address bureau and scrawled out the name Natalya Sergeyevna Maklakova on one of their enquiry slips. This time at long last I obtained an answer: "12, Zubovsky Boulevard, Flat 1."

I shall not waste my readers' time with a description of my excitement as I set out for the house of this—real, live granddaughter. That does not require any explanation....

The house was a small wooden one inside a large courtyard and with a few small steps leading up to the door. I knocked.



The door was opened by a tall elderly woman with pure white hair and a bearing that betrayed a rather exaggerated sense of her own importance.

"Whom would you be looking for?"

"Excuse me," I began, "could I speak to Natalya Sergeyevna Maklakova?"

"I am she. What can I do for you?"

"Pleased to meet you, Natalya Sergeyevna," I replied in a highly excited voice. "I was given your address at the address bureau.... I am doing some work on Lermontov at the moment. It is in that connection that I have come round to see you...."

"But my dear fellow!" exclaimed the old lady in a voice full of regret, "there was little point in looking me up. I can't be of any help to you. You see, all the poems that Lermontov dedicated to my grandmother Natalya Fyodorovna and all his letters that she kept in a special box together with the poems have long ago been burnt to ashes. It was my grandfather Nikolai Mikhailovich Obreskov who destroyed them out of jealousy for Mikhail Yuryevich. There's nothing left."

"But Natalya Sergeyevna!" I cried, "if you only knew what you've just been saying!"

"What's so special about it?" asked Natalya Sergeyevna in surprise. "I haven't told you anything of interest, indeed I have nothing of interest to tell. The only lines I know, young man, are those which are printed in all editions of Lermontov and which you of course know just as well as I do:

"It may be I deserve not well  
Your love: that's not for me to tell;  
But you have shamelessly abused me  
Who was most trusting and most true,  
And I shall always say that you  
In this have most unjustly used me,"

she recited in a slightly shaky voice. "It was from Mamma that I learnt that those lines were written for my grandmother Natalya Fyodorovna, but that is all I know."

"Natalya Sergeyevna," I asked in astonishment, "why did you never tell anyone about the friendship between your grandmother and Lermontov, about his love for her? Why has her name never been mentioned in print? Why have you kept it a secret?"

"What reason was there for us to have our grandmother's name bandied about in public?" Natalya Sergeyevna asked in

her turn. "What was there to be proud of? The fact that she preferred grandfather to Lermontov?"

By this time I had crossed the threshold. Natalya Maklakova asked me in, offered me a seat on a faded divan, and I started plying her with questions, anything that occurred to my overexcited imagination.

However, the old lady had been quite right when she said she knew very little. But even that "little" was a "lot" for me. I heard her confirm that Lermontov had portrayed his relationship with Natalya Ivanova in the play *The Strange Man*, that Ivanova had kept a copy of the play which Lermontov himself had neatly copied out for her, complete with a dedication in verse. She also told me that Natalya had had a sister Darya Fyodorovna who had married an officer by the name of Ostrovsky and spent all her life in Kursk where her daughters had lived right up to the time of the revolution. When I asked about her grandfather Nikolai Mikhailovich Obreskov, Natalya Sergeyevna was not able to help me at all, she had no idea why he had been reduced to the ranks.

"I don't remember hearing anything about that," she went on. "All I do know is that towards the end of his life grandfather was a marshal of the nobility in some uyezd in Novgorod Province. It was there that he had his country estate as well."

"And there was me thinking that he might have been a Decembrist," I admitted to Natalya Sergeyevna.

"My dear fellow," said the old lady with a little gasp of surprise, "how fine that would have been if he *had* turned out to be a Decembrist!"

Finally I took my leave, but before I had gone very far I thought of some more questions that I had forgotten to ask her and so retraced my steps. After that my visits to Natalya Sergeyevna became as regular as clockwork.

### *The Trunk from Perkhushkovo*

Natalya Maklakova had suggested that it might be worthwhile for her to go and visit all her Moscow relatives and ask them whether they remembered anything about Natalya or Darya Fyodorovna, their father, mother, aunts, uncles and friends. All she asked me to do was write down the questions she should put to them. As she herself explained, it was much simpler for her to find out all that than for me to do so.

I was very pleased at her readiness to help and brought along a regular fileful of questions.

One day when I decided to pop by, Natalya Sergeyevna, after coming out with a whole heap of names of her grandmother's distant relatives past and present turned to me with a request to get hold of a vehicle.

In astonishment I asked: "What kind of vehicle? "

"One that could transport a trunk belonging to my sister Khristina. If you remember, I told you that Khristina spent her last years outside Moscow, not far from the village of Perkhushkovo. The belongings that she left behind we entrusted to the neighbours' safekeeping. But that was so long ago that I even have my doubts as to whether the trunk is still intact. I should like to have it brought back here but it's so enormous that it was turned down as ordinary freight. These last few days I've been racking my brains trying to remember whether there was anything in it that might be of some interest to you."

I quickly got hold of a small lorry, and Natalya Sergeyevna sent someone to fetch the trunk. I arrived at her house on Zubovsky Boulevard well ahead of time and to kill time began pacing to and fro in front of the gates: it was too early to go into the house, for I should have felt rather sheepish to show Natalya Sergeyevna how impatient I was, and yet I was determined not to miss the moment of the trunk's arrival.

It was starting to grow dark when the lorry drew up. The driver and I let down the back flap, pulled out an enormous trunk with studded corners and dragged it into the house. I was eager to take the brunt of the weight, for I felt most possessive towards the trunk. Eventually we had it installed in the middle of the room. Natalya Maklakova set to work sorting out the contents. Out came an endless train of little perfume bottles, little boxes for little perfume bottles, little albums of keepsakes with mother-of-pearl covers, old fans and kid gloves, hat feathers, hat pins, old buttons the likes of which one would never encounter nowadays, a tea-kettle, an iron, an oil-stove, a coffee-grinder and wood-chopper.... Each little object had Natalya Maklakova in ecstasies, but for me there was nothing!

Then, when the trunk was almost empty the old lady lifted up an old light-brown leather frame from the very bottom of the trunk and peered at something with a wistful smile on her face.

"You see, something for you has turned up after all...."

From where I was sitting all I could see was the back of the picture, but on closer inspection I noticed an inscription in

old-fashioned handwriting which read: "Natalya Fyodorovna Obreskova, née Ivanova".

I took the frame from her hand, turned it over and finally found myself face to face with the woman whom Lermontov had loved so ardently and on whose account I had been "suffering" so long.

The face was a perfect oval. The eyes were languid and almond-shaped and there was a kind smile lurking in the corners of the full lips. The hair was piled high setting off the shapely neck and sloping shoulders. The expression in the face was just as Lermontov had described it in one of his poems dedicated to N.F.I.:

To people—proud, to fate—resigned,  
Not false—yet speaking not her mind.

But Natalya Maklakova had by this time found another portrait which she held out to me exclaiming: "And here's Grandfather as well! I was sure that there had been a pair of portraits, both in pencil and in identical frames...."

I turned to study Obreskov. The young face was quite handsome, framed with a curly beard. Yet there was something arrogant and supercilious in the expression. He was dressed in civilian clothes: his tail-coat had a high collar as worn in the days of Pushkin; at his throat there was a velvet tie and in addition he wore a lorgnette on a chain and a cross on a striped ribbon, which must have been the Order of St. George, in his buttonhole.

"Well," I thought to myself, "what could be simpler: all I have to do now is to go to the Lenin Library, look through the list of the Knights of St. George ever since the Order was first instituted and find out when it was conferred on Obreskov and what for."

So off I set for the Lenin Library ... but, believe it or not, no Nikolai Obreskov had been awarded the Order of St. George. A Cross of St. George had been conferred on his father and that was all.

I was quite baffled! Surely Obreskov could not have posed for his portrait wearing his father's decoration in his buttonhole? That would really have been taking things too far!

So I decided to find out, come what may, whether that really had been the case and what kind of person Obreskov had actually been.

*Soldier of the Nizhny Novgorod Regiment*

I looked for the name Obreskov in Moscow archives but in vain. I spent a particularly long time rummaging about in the papers of the Military History Archives, but again to no purpose. Then I went back to Leningrad and in the Leningrad Military History Archives at last I came across what I was looking for:

"The General Tribunal of the First Army versus Lieutenant Obreskov of the Arzamass Mounted Chasseurs." At last I was able to get to the crux of the matter. The forms, attestations, reports and interrogation records enabled me to put together Obreskov's story once and for all.

He had been born in 1802 and was the son of a general. After passing out from the Pages Corps he was given a commission in one of the Guards' regiments but was soon afterwards transferred to the Arzamass Mounted Chasseurs. In 1825 that regiment was stationed in Nizhnedevitsk, not far from Voronezh, and the officers were often invited to balls at the house of the Voronezh governor, one N.I. Krivtsov who was married to a celebrated beauty E.F. Vadkovskaya. Obreskov was a close relative of the lady's and he was welcomed into that household like one of the family.

After one of the balls the governor discovered that some pearls had been stolen from his wife's bedroom together with a gold snuff-box and an emerald clasp set in diamonds. Krivtsov assumed that the culprit must have been one of the guests, and the shade of suspicion fell upon the Arzamass regiment. Soon afterwards the valuables were spotted by chance among the belongings of one of the officers. He was summoned to the regimental commander for questioning; the officer admitted to the theft and handed over all the lost property. The man in question was Lieutenant Obreskov.

The military tribunal stripped Obreskov of his commission and nobility status and demoted him to the ranks of the Pereyasavl Regiment. Later he was stationed in the Caucasus with the Nizhny Novgorod Dragoons who took part in the Turkish War in 1829. Obreskov distinguished himself in that campaign and was awarded a "soldier's St. George Cross". That small cross was worn with an identical black and orange ribbon, only it did not give the bearer the right to be included in the lists of the Knights of St. George. That explained Obreskov's cross in the portrait.

Obreskov served in the ranks for seven years. It was not until 1833 that he was finally granted a "royal pardon" and discharged with the rank of collegiate registrar. In tsarist Russia that was the rank held by the very humblest civil servants, such as Pushkin's postmaster for instance, and so it was right from the bottom of the ladder that Obreskov had to start his new life. In 1836 he entered the civil service in the chancellery of the governor of Kursk.

The years that followed are of no particular interest for our present purposes. Initially Obreskov was engaged in reinstating himself as a member of the nobility, and by the sixties he was actually a Marshal of the Nobility in Demyansk Uyezd of Novgorod Province.

For us another detail is much more important. The year when he settled in Kursk and joined the Governor's staff he was already married to Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova.

What induced her to marry this discredited man who could entertain no hopes of social acceptability or a successful career? This, of course, is something we shall never know. True, Obreskov was a man of considerable means. His estates in two provinces numbered 750 serfs.

### *The Album in a Velvet Cover*

Once again things were taking an unfortunate turn. I had learnt a great deal about Obreskov and nothing new about Lermontov. What was more, I had collected an enormous number of names of Natalya Fyodorovna Ivanova's close and distant relatives and had to get down to work on those.

One of the most important things I learnt was that Natalya Fyodorovna had had a stepfather. After the death of the playwright Fyodor Fyodorovich Ivanov her mother married a Mikhail Nikolayevich Chartorizhsky and Natalya had been brought up in his family. This meant that Lermontov must have been a guest at Chartorizhsky's house, and so I felt I ought to find out more about him.

I asked Natalya Maklakova about him. Nothing doing.

I asked Chulkov about him. Nothing doing.

So I started pestering Natalya Maklakova with questions once more, insisting that I had to find out something about this Chartorizhsky. At first she assured me she did not remember him. But my insistence eventually bore fruit: she recalled that Chartorizhsky had been the maiden name of the grandmother of a certain Nina Mikhailovna Annenkova.

"But who's Nina Mikhailovna Annenkova?"

"She's an old lady who lives in the house of Anatoli Mikhailovich Fokin, a splendid and most obliging person. I'll write a note to him asking him to introduce you. Their house is right opposite: 15, Zubovsky Boulevard."

I crossed the street and found the Fokins' house in the courtyard of a large eight-storeyed block of flats. A very tall man of about fifty pranced out to meet me. His face was clean-shaven and his mouth looked as if it would break into a smile any moment.

After giving my hand a hearty shake he introduced himself as Fokin and I handed him the note from Natalya Maklakova. With a brief apology he scanned through it, then put it into his pocket and asked in what way he might be of assistance to me, showing me inside with an expansive theatrical gesture.

I explained why I had come at which Fokin gave a deep sigh and frowned sadly. His expression was regret personified: Nina Mikhailovna was very advanced in years and not at all well, and her memory was most unreliable. A few years before she had indeed mentioned in a conversation with him, Anatoli Mikhailovich, that her grandmother's maiden name had been Chartorizhskaya and that she had been buried in the cemetery of the Donskoy Monastery under a monument bearing a marble angel with spread wings. But now she would definitely not be capable of recalling anything more and would only grow agitated at being asked to try. He went on to point out that it really was not worthwhile disturbing the old lady, and said he was sorry that I had wasted my time in vain. He himself, much to his dismay, had nothing of interest to tell me about Lermontov. Old treasures that had once belonged to various grandfathers and grandmothers had long since changed hands: some had been lost, others sold. Maria Markovna, his wife, however, did still possess an album which had been passed down to her from Maria Dmitriyevna Zhedrinskaya, the wife of the Zhedrinsky who had been governor of Kursk at the end of the 1860s. The album contained, among other things, a verse by the poet Apukhtin in his own hand.

"Perhaps you would like to have a look?" inquired Fokin in hospitable tones. "Apukhtin's autograph has yet to be published."

Apukhtin? ... What did I want with Apukhtin? He had absolutely no bearing on my work. But Fokin by this time had already produced a large autograph album with a dark blue velvet cover out of his writing desk. Sure enough, there on the

first page was a verse of Apukhtin's dedicated to the owner.

I cannot remember the words exactly; all I do remember is that Apukhtin said something about finding an "oasis" under the governor's roof where he felt quite at home and that he was about to set off on a long journey but hoped to be able to lay his "wanderer's staff" at the "dear feet" of the governor's wife one day. The date at the bottom of the page was August 2, 1873, which meant that the album had only first been opened over thirty years after Lermontov's death. How could there possibly be anything of interest to me in it?

"There's nothing else that is original, apart from the verse of Apukhtin's, in that album," Fokin informed me. "It's not really worthwhile skimming through it. All the other verses are well-known ones which Maria Dmitriyevna simply copied out of other books."

He was right too, the other poems were well-known—Nekrasov's *Come Down to the Volga*, Maykov's *Haymaking*, Lermontov's *Lonely in the Wild North There Stands....* These were followed by some verses by Fet, some Sverbeev or other, then more Nekrasov, Tyutchev, Pushkin....

I was just about to hand the album back, leafing through the remaining pages when suddenly, in Maria Zhedrinskaya's hand what should I see but:

*To N. F. Ivanova*

How can so brief a rendez-vous  
Bring comfort now the time is nigh  
When I must take my leave of you....  
The hour is come, and so: good bye.  
This crazéd verse, this farewell verse  
I dash down in your album here...  
That it may be the only trace  
My grief and I have left you there.

*M. Y. Lermontov*

Even the date was provided: 1832.

My heart missed a beat. Unpublished lines dedicated to my Natalya Ivanova! Her name in full at last! It was too good to be true! I could not believe my good fortune. To think that I had come across this poem in such an unlikely place, an autograph album and one dating from the seventies at that!

I glanced further down the page.... But what was this? !



*To D.F. Ivanova*

When life plays fast and loose and fate combines  
 To cast a shadow on your light heart's gladness—  
 Do not forget to glance back at these lines  
 And think that he—who now in sorrow pines—  
 Will not abuse your trust, nor cause you sadness.

*M. Y. Lermontov*

The same date once again: 1832.

I turned over the page only to find more unpublished Lermontov!

As I look briefly back along  
 The linked chain of times now ended—  
 I sigh no more for what is gone  
 Beyond recall: small joy is blended  
 For me therein. For then as now—  
 A steppe-land cross, lost in the snows—  
 Forgotten, battered, I withstood  
 The infernal blizzards and the flood  
 Of passions that about me flows.  
 For some response to love I longed  
 In vain; and if love's still a theme  
 That has not ceased to haunt my song—  
 Why then, I sing but of a dream.  
 And as a shooting-star may fall  
 Through evening dusk—a bright deceit....  
 Since love was here my all-in-all  
 Like all things here, it proved a cheat.

*Lermontov*

The date—1831.

“This album,” Fokin broke in, casting a quizzical gaze in my direction as I sat there poring over it avidly, “no longer actually belongs to Maria Markovna. She has it sold to the State Literary Museum, and from tomorrow onwards it will be their property. In view of that, I should be grateful if you would keep the fact that we have been looking through it to yourself....”

“Best assured,” I mumbled, thinking to myself: “Shall I tell him that there are some unpublished verses by Lermontov in the album? But what if he should then decide not to sell the album but to keep it, and what if something were to happen to it so that these poems which have survived by some miracle should be lost for posterity as dozens of other Lermontov’s

poems! No, the risk is too horrible to contemplate. He's sold it—and that's that."

I handed the album back with a comment to the effect that the verse by Apukhtin was most interesting.

The next day I hurried to the Literary Museum and enquired with an air of indifference: "You appear to have bought an old autograph album belonging to Fokin? "

"Yes, we have."

"Could I have a look at it? "

"No, I am afraid not. It hasn't been inventoried yet. Once the inventory's been written up, *then* you can."

An inventory?! That meant that someone else would discover the Lermontov before me and all my work would have been in vain.

A few days later I called in again and asked whether the inventory had been completed. To my surprise the answer was yes. With a great effort to keep my breathing steady I asked if anything of interest had been found in it.

"Nothing special, apart from an autograph of Apukhtin's."

I almost burst out with gleeful laughter, I was so thrilled. To think they had not noticed! ! !

Without losing any more time I wrote an application to the curator asking for permission to study the unpublished verse of Apukhtin's. What I copied out of course was not Apukhtin but Lermontov's verses. Only then did I ask permission to publish them.

### *Farewell to N.F.I.*

All that is left to explain now is how the unpublished verses of Lermontov's found their way into the autograph album of the wife of the Kursk governor.

This presented no particular difficulties. In 1836 Natalya Fyodorovna settled in Kursk with her husband. Her sister Darya lived in that town right up until her death, and her daughters went on living there after she died. Understandably enough, poetry enthusiasts among the ladies of Kursk would have copied the verses Lermontov had dedicated to the Ivanov sisters into their own albums. This explains how the verses finally made their way to the album belonging to Maria Zhedrinskaya.

Perhaps some people may entertain doubts as to whether the verses really did stem from Lermontov's pen or not.

Any such doubts are groundless. Definitive proof of this is provided by the poem *Stanzas* in Fokin's album, some lines of which are identical with the poem also entitled *Stanzas* that is to be found in Lermontov's own handwriting in one of his notebooks kept at Pushkin House.

These verses clarify the whole story of Lermontov's relationship with N.F.I., and demonstrate conclusively, that the remarkable poem *To\** written in 1832 is also addressed to the same Natalya Ivanova.

When Lermontov addresses N.F.I. for the last time it is to take leave of her for ever. With incredible bitterness he looks back over the preceding two years, yet at the same time expresses confidence in his own great destiny:

I will not play the suitor's part,  
Henceforth your smiles have no more power  
Nor yet your frowns to move my heart.  
Know! We are strangers from this hour.  
You have forgotten, it appears—  
My freedom I'll not sacrifice  
To error: as it is—two years  
And more I've wasted on your eyes  
And smile, and, as it is, too long  
Have all my youthful hopes been vested  
In you! That love might wax more strong  
The whole world else have I detested.  
Who knows! Perhaps the moments squandered  
At your feet served but to estrange  
Me from the Muse. And what, I wonder,  
Did you e'er give me in exchange?  
In may be, in high thought immersed,  
My spirit powered in poetry,  
I might have written wondrous verse  
And so gained immortality?  
Why did you promise tenderly  
A crown more coveted than fame?  
Why and, oh why, could you not be  
At first as you at last became!  
I will not plead! Love whom you will,  
Or dream of love upon you laved!  
There's nothing on this earth can kill  
My pride or hold me still enslaved.  
To far-off mountains, southern skies,  
I'll make my way, perhaps, and yet

Too close between us are the ties  
 That we should easily forget.  
 From now on I shall take my pleasure.  
 Wherever hearts are to be won.  
 I'll laugh with all—but I shall never  
 Weep any more with anyone.  
 And so I should not love the sex,  
 As I have loved, I'll love and leave them.  
 How should I womankind respect  
 When even an angel proves deceiving?  
 I would have death or torment dared  
 Or—madman! —taken up my stand  
 Against the world in arms—to share,  
 The pressure of your youthful hand!  
 My soul I gave, without reserve,  
 Knowing no perfidy, most true.  
 Did you of that soul know the worth? —  
 You knew. But I did not know you.

On that note ends the history of their love, and also that of my fascinating search.



## ILYA ZILBERSTEIN

Ilya Samoilovich Zilberstein is a prominent literary historian, Doctor of Philology, the sponsor and editor of *Literaturnoye Nasledstvo* (Literary Heritage), a publication started in 1931 which numbers, to date, over 80 volumes.

Ilya Zilberstein's studies are devoted to the biographies of Alexander Pushkin, Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Anton Chekhov and other major Russian authors, and the history of Russian painting (*From Pushkin's Papers: New Discoveries, Pushkin and His Friends, Repin and Turgenev, Repin and Gorky*, etc.). One of his best books examines the paintings of the Decembrist Nikolai Bestuzhev, who, while in a penal settlement in Siberia, created a portrait gallery of all exiled Decembrists and the heroic women who shared their tragic fate. This book can truly be termed a model "ressurrection" of history. Ilya Zilberstein's name stands on the title-page of two volumes of *Literaturnoye Nasledstvo*, which include a mass of new facts and publications pertaining to previously unknown works by the painter Ilya Repin.

In his recent years Zilberstein has been devoting himself to studies of Turgenev. A series of his articles under the general title *Parisian Finds* was published in the magazine *Ogonyok* and in *Literary Gazette* between 1966 and 1972. One of them is included in the present volume.

Abant Mysore



Ivan Turgenev. Drawing by Pauline Viardot. 1879





Pauline Viardot. Water-Colour by Sokolov



Ivan Turgenev. Drawing by I. Repin. 1884



## SPOTLIGHT ON TURGENEV

### *Turgenev's Diaries*

Turgenev is well-known not only as the author of novels, stories and plays but also for his verse and poems in prose, epigrams and translations of poetry, articles and reviews, speeches, memoirs and letters. For the best part of a century all these have been appearing in many different languages and have become part of the world's cultural heritage. However, nothing has been published from one other part of Turgenev's literary legacy, namely his diaries. Yet it is precisely in diaries that we find masters of the written word at their most revealing and frank, more so than in their letters and memoirs, when they start discussing literary tastes, the social questions that interest them and their personal experiences. Moreover, not only have Turgenev's diaries never been published, but the very question of their existence has never been subjected to detailed investigation. This is particularly surprising seeing that Turgenev himself once quoted three sentences from his diaries and on another occasion reproduced several lines from them in a letter to a friend.

In the enormous research material that has appeared on this great writer there has never been a single article that attempted to provide answers to the questions as to whether Turgenev wrote up his diaries systematically, and if so, in which years and in what circumstances he decided to start keeping a diary. Then of course there is the need to establish whether Turgenev's diaries have survived to the present day, and, if so, why they have never appeared in print. These are some of the questions which this article investigates.

### I

On November 16, 1850, "the colonel's wife Varvara Petrovna Turgeneva" (as she is designated on her tombstone) died in

the city of Moscow. In a letter to Pauline Viardot of December 5, Turgenev informs her that when his mother's property was made accessible for his inspection not one paper of any value was found; "she had burnt everything before she died". Turgenev goes on to recount: "However, we did find a diary written in pencil covering the last months of her life." Apparently what made the deepest impact on the writer at that period was his acquaintance with the diary written by his mother, an extraordinarily heartless and cruel person. "What a woman, my dearest, what a woman!" he comments later in the same letter. "I could not sleep a wink the whole night. May God forgive her everything.... But what a life! ... Truly, I am shaken beyond words.... Some time I shall show you this diary; the very thought of concealing this grim yet interesting find from you weighs heavy upon me."

On the evening of December 8th Turgenev makes another reference to his musings on the subject of the diary: "The thought of this diary haunts me.... But I should try and put it out of my mind."

However, the writer continued to ponder over this record of a life. It may well be that it was partly as a result of the impression this discovery of his mother's diary made upon him that Turgenev decided to start keeping a diary of his own. At any rate the next year a new literary occupation was added to the existing ones. In 1852 in his *Memorial* (a short chronological list of the main events of his youth) Turgenev notes that he began keeping a diary the previous year. This would point to the fact that Turgenev regarded the commencement of systematic work on his diary as an important landmark in the year 1851.

It would appear that Turgenev's work on this diary was intensive. It is possible that Turgenev destroyed the diary together with part of his archives in February 1857 in Paris. When he lost faith in his creative powers and was undergoing a profound emotional crisis, Turgenev wrote to Botkin on March 1st: "I shall not write about myself in this letter to you: I have gone to pieces—utterly and completely; there are no two ways about it. I feel all the time like so much rubbish that people have forgotten to sweep out—so much for my *Stimmung*.\* I only hope this will pass when I leave Paris.... The day before yesterday (fearing to look like an imitation of Gogol) I did not burn my papers, but I did tear some up though and put them

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\* Mood (Germ.).—Ed.

down the water-closet, all my drafts, plans etc." At the end of this letter Turgenev mentions that he had been making the acquaintance of large numbers of people and goes on to say: "In general I should be able to spend time pleasantly, if I didn't find life hateful at the moment. I shall have a good deal to tell you when I see you, but I do not feel like writing about it." This is a clear reference to the problems of an intimate character linked with Pauline Viardot, a point not stressed in commentaries on this most interesting letter.

During the next twenty-five years of Turgenev's life there were, of course, periods when again and again he felt a profound need to unburden himself in a diary. This is borne out by authoritative evidence of various kinds, to be found in documents, memoirs and letters. Most important of all are Turgenev's own admissions that he kept diaries and what is more, his quoting of excerpts from them, on one occasion even in print, as mentioned earlier.

In his retrospective essay entitled *On the Subject of "Fathers and Sons"* Turgenev notes that, after the novel had been printed in the journal *Russky Vestnik* (Russian Herald), he had experienced a variety of reactions but all of them depressing: "I sensed a coldness that at times bordered on indignation in people whom I liked and who were close to me; I was congratulated, almost embraced by men from the opposite camp, from my enemies. This took me aback ... depressed me. However, my conscience did not plague me: I knew quite well that I was being honest and that not only had I written in a spirit free from prejudice, but had even displayed sympathy for the hero I had created." To these lines Turgenev adds the following note: "I take the liberty of citing the following extract from my diary: '(Spasskoye, 1861) Sunday, July 30th. One and a half hours ago I completed my novel at last.... I am uncertain as to what success it will enjoy. The *Sovremennik*\* will most likely pour contempt over me on account of Bazarov and will not believe that while writing the novel I found myself involuntarily attracted by him!'" Elaborating this idea in the pages that followed, Turgenev again refers back to the relevant passage from his diary: "...If a writer himself does not know whether or not he likes a character he has created (as was the case with my attitude to Bazarov, for the 'involuntary attraction' I refer to in my diary does not mean I necessarily like him)—then you have a truly sad state of affairs! Readers are

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\* *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) a journal progressive at the period.—Ed.

then going to attribute to the writer non-existent sympathy or antipathy, anything to avoid unpleasant 'vagueness'." From this it is quite clear that while working on this novel, Turgenev was keeping a diary which he had to hand in late 1868 and early 1869 when he was preparing his essay *On the Subject of "Fathers and Sons"* in Baden-Baden.

There is evidence extant showing that the diary, written at the same time as this major novel, was preserved by Turgenev until a still later date. In a conversation with Kropotkin—which must have taken place about 1879—the writer asked him his opinion of Bazarov. Kropotkin came out with the following frank answer: "Bazarov is a first-rate portrayal of a nihilist; but it is clear that you sympathise with him less than you do with your other heroes." "But on the contrary I *did* sympathise with him, and very deeply!" exclaimed Turgenev with unexpected fervour. "Come home with me now and I shall show you the diary where I noted down how I wept when I had completed the account of Bazarov's death." Bearing in mind Turgenev's admission that he did not have a real liking for Bazarov but rather felt an "involuntary attraction" towards him, it would appear that this memoirist must have reproduced the writer's words regarding his attitude to this particular hero somewhat inaccurately (in fact Kropotkin himself notes further on: "I had the impression that Turgenev admired Bazarov rather than liked him."). On the other hand, Kropotkin's reference to the existence of the diary which the writer had been keeping in 1861 is extremely valuable.

In 1873 Turgenev made the acquaintance of an American writer of Norwegian descent, Hjalmar Boyesen during a visit the latter paid to Paris. The following year, when Boyesen published a piece in a New York journal about the conversations that had taken place between them, he quoted the following words of Turgenev's in connection with Bazarov: "He captured my imagination to such an extent that I started keeping a diary in his name, in which he noted down his opinions on all major questions of the moment, religious, political and social. I did the same for one of the secondary characters in *On the Eve*... I can't even remember his name now....'

"Perhaps it was Shubin?" I made so bold as to prompt Turgenev.

"Yes, that's right, it was Shubin!" exclaimed Turgenev with unconcealed pleasure. 'It appears you remember my characters better than I do myself. Yes, it was Pavel Shubin. I

recently burnt that diary and it was a good deal more voluminous than the novel in which Shubin figures. I look upon such things as ground work; before a character has taken definite shape and has acquired a distinct appearance and life of his own in my mind's eye I cannot advance a single step in my work.' ”

Another direct confirmation of the fact that “Bazarov's diary” existed can be gleaned from the words of another habitué of the literary world, who made Turgenev's acquaintance several years later. According to this memoirist Turgenev made the following statement: “When I created Bazarov I used to keep a diary in his name. When I came across an interesting book or person, or when a social event took place I would enter it in the diary describing it from Bazarov's point of view. The result was an extremely thick note-book of most interesting content, but it was lost. Someone borrowed it to read and failed to return it.” The editors of the newspaper in which these memoirs were published in 1884 added the following note in connection with these lines: “Perhaps the owner of the afore-mentioned manuscript might come forward in response to this announcement? Bazarov's diary, if it had appeared in print, might once and for all have solved the riddle of this character, whose appearance was to cause the writer so much heart-searching, giving rise as it did to so many contradictory judgements and critical interpretations and so much misunderstanding among Russian youth. Those in possession of these manuscripts of Ivan Turgenev's must realise that the writings of this great artist are the heritage of all enlightened Russia.” Unfortunately, this appeal met with no response although it appeared a mere nine months after Turgenev's death.

It is more than likely that an artist who felt a compulsive need to keep a diary in the name of his hero, in order to clarify his conception of the latter's ideas and emotions, must have kept a diary of his own as well, for the diary form as a means of expressing his ideas and moods was seen by him as something natural, indeed even familiar.

A further documentary confirmation of the existence of Turgenev's diaries dates from 1874. The writer was then undergoing medical treatment in Karlsbad, where he had gone after spending three weeks in Spasskoye. This is what Nadezhda Ostrovskaya writes in connection with the visit she paid Turgenev: “We found Ivan Sergeyevich up and about, but he complained that his legs were giving him considerable pain.



"My visit this time was not a success. I thought that I should do some work on my novel in the country, but instead I had to take to my bed, and lay around interminably. Let me show you the impression life in the country made on me this year.'

"He walked over to his desk on which he had already laid out tidily writing paper, pens, pencils and his brief-case, and from which he now took out a note-book.

"Look, this is all I was in a state to note down in my diary.'

"We read a date followed by the words: 'This cursed hole!'

"Oh, so you keep a diary, do you?' asked my husband.

"I have been doing so for a long time now. Apart from other reasons I keep a diary as a constant exercise in writing. For a writer it is essential to do some writing every day. If you do not take the trouble to do so even for a short time, you lose the habit and it is difficult to take it up again.'

"And will your diary be printed one day?'

"No-o! On no account! Even in my will I shall stipulate that it be burnt immediately after my death.'

"That would be a shame.'

"It can't be helped! There's nothing for it. It could not possibly be printed. Everything must be burnt...."

This information is most authoritative for Nadezhda Ostrovskaya's memoirs are among the most reliable records of Turgenev that exist. The novel to which Turgenev refers here is *Virgin Soil* which he spent a great deal of time over: he originally conceived the plan for it in 1870, but only completed it in the summer of 1876. The fate of the diary from which Turgenev showed Ostrovskaya and her husband an excerpt relating to his visit to Spasskoye is not known.

Particularly interesting in this episode recounted by Nadezhda Ostrovskaya is Turgenev's comment to the effect that he had been keeping diaries for a long time. Turgenev was to continue keeping a regular diary after 1874 as well. In the letters to his friends of that period he makes several references to his diary; on one occasion he even cites an excerpt from his diary supplying the quotation and even the date of this most interesting quotation. At the beginning of 1877 Yakov Polonsky sent Turgenev a long lyric poem entitled *Message of Old* in which Turgenev's rapture at Pauline Viardot's artistic talent is described, although no actual names are mentioned. After receiving this poem, Turgenev, who was in Paris at the time, replied to the poet in the following vein (April 7, 1877): "My dear friend Yakov Petrovich, your poem in which there are

remarkable lines such as—

‘This mournful night a dreary haze

Seeps through the window and floods our gaze’,

filled me with profound melancholy: so that you might understand why, I am sending you the following lines from my diary: ‘March 17th: Midnight. I am sitting at my desk again; downstairs my poor friend is singing something in her now utterly frail voice; my mood is darker than the dark of night.... It is as if the grave were hurrying to devour me: each day flies past like some mere moment, empty, aimless, colourless.... Before you have time to look round, it is time to flop back into bed again. I feel I have neither the right nor the urge to live; there is nothing left to do, to wait for or even desire....’

“I shall not quote you any more: the tone is so despondent. You forget that I am 58 and she is 55; not only can she no longer sing, but when the last season opened at the theatre you describe so eloquently, the singer who once sang the leading part in *Prophète*\* was not even sent tickets. Why? For a long time there has been nothing worthwhile to expect from her.... Yet you speak of the ‘rays of fame’, the ‘charms of song’. ...My dear friend we are just two fragments of a vessel long since shattered.... I at least feel myself to be no more than an old crock out of use.

“So now you will understand the effect your verse had upon me (I would beg you to destroy this letter).”

When in the spring of 1882 his serious illness obliged Turgenev to give thought to the fate that awaited his papers, on May 1 he turned to that member of the literary world with whom his ties were closest, namely Pavel Annenkov, in a letter containing the following passage: “Everything that may be found among my papers after my death such as drafts for novels, incomplete or unpolished stories, and likewise my private papers and correspondence together with manuscripts of my printed works I all make over to you, dear Pavel Vasilievich, to use and dispose of as you think fit.” It is more than likely that the phrase “private papers” refers precisely to the diaries.

Seven months later Turgenev makes a direct reference to the existence of his diaries in a letter to Dmitry Grigorovich. Writing to inform him of the contents of his *Poems in Prose* that appeared in the December issue of the journal *Vestnik Evropy* (European Herald), Turgenev points out: “I did not

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\* An opera by Meyerbeer. First performed in Paris, on April 16, 1849.—Ed.

make any selection. I simply omitted all the personal, autobiographical passages, which I have not read to anyone and indeed do not intend to, for they are to be destroyed together with my diary."

The same intention is expressed in Turgenev's letter to the journalist B. Chivilyov written on December 29, 1882: "The unpublished *Poems in Prose* are unknown to even my most intimate friends. They are to be burnt after I am gone, together with my diary."

A similar reference to Turgenev's diary is to be found in the memoirs of Isaac Pavlovsky who paid frequent visits to the writer in the years 1879–1883. In 1875, the young student had been tried in connection with the inquiry into propaganda activities within the Russian Empire (the "Trial of the 193"\*). After being arrested a second time, in April 1878, and banished to the Archangel province where he was to live under police surveillance, he escaped abroad and eventually made his way to Paris. Here Turgenev was to take a sympathetic interest in his affairs, and, in particular, to write the preface for Pavlovsky's essays *Solitary Confinement. Notes of a Nihilist*, which were published in November 1879, in the Paris newspaper *Le Temps*. Pavlovsky saw Turgenev at work on several occasions and also talked with him on the subject of his work. Noting that the writer's literary activities were progressing slowly Pavlovsky elaborates as follows: "I am referring here to his novels and stories for he was actually writing a good deal but specifically in his *Diary*. I have never seen it although Turgenev has talked to me about it on several occasions. Once, for instance, while he was talking to me about a young writer whom we both knew and who had been complaining to Ivan Sergeyevich about the misfortunes that beset him, Turgenev remarked: 'For pity's sake! A writer cannot, indeed, must not give way to his misfortune! He must learn from and take advantage of every situation. People say that a writer is always highly strung, is subject to more powerful emotions than other people. For this very reason he is obliged to hold himself in check, always to observe most meticulously himself and others. If, for instance, a great sorrow befalls you—sit down and record it: such and such happened, such and such were my reactions. The tragedy will pass, while the invaluable record will remain: sometimes a page of this sort can provide the nucleus of a major work which will be of artistic value precisely because it is true to life, part of

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\* A mass trial of Populists in 1877–78.—Ed.

life's living flesh.' 'It is easy, Ivan Sergeyevich, to say: simply sit down and record, but a person may very well only have one idea in his mind—to put a bullet through his brains,' I objected. 'Well if that's the case, record that as well. If all unhappy artists put bullets through their brains, there would be no artists left now, for all artists are more or less unhappy. Indeed happy artists are unthinkable for happiness means peace, and nothing can be created out of peace. *As for me, I always keep a diary*, in which I record everything that interests me; in my diary I feel at home, can pass judgement on all and sundry.'—'Do you plan ever to print it?' 'Never!' exclaimed Ivan Sergeyevich vehemently, 'I have instructed Madame Viardot to have it destroyed immediately after my death and she will carry out my wishes religiously.'

"However, I have reason to doubt that this is really the case, and even suspect that Ivan Sergeyevich's *Diary* may appear in print in the near future."

Three years later Pavlovsky had printed in Paris a book entitled *Souvenirs sur Tourguénéff*, in which he also reproduced this conversation with Turgenev. However, the last sentence in connection with his conjecture that the diary would soon be printed he replaced with another thought: "Perhaps Turgenev's wishes were not carried out. It would be wonderful if Madame Viardot had not obeyed this command of the great novelist, and the diary could one day be published." At the time Turgenev's diary is most likely to have been in the possession of Pauline Viardot: after all, the *Poems in Prose* which Turgenev had considered should be burnt after his death together with the diary had not been destroyed.... If the diaries had no longer been in existence, Pauline Viardot would more likely than not have printed a refutation of Pavlovsky's assumptions.

In the memoirs relating to this period there is yet another unmistakable confirmation of the existence of Turgenev's diaries complete with a reference to a discussion of this particular subject with the writer. In an article on Pauline Viardot written on the occasion of her death we find the following reference to a memoirist's meeting with Turgenev in the summer of 1882 in Bougival. "Ivan Sergeyevich once said to me there: 'I always keep a diary and record everything of interest to me. In my diary I feel at home, can pass judgement on all and sundry.'—'Do you plan ever to print it?' 'Never!' exclaimed Ivan Sergeyevich leaving no room for any doubt. 'I have instructed Madame Viardot to have it destroyed after my death. She is sure to carry out my request.' Whether she did

comply with this cruel command I do not know. But I have some reason to believe that she refrained from so doing. At any rate, apart from the diary there were a great many other papers shedding valuable light on the age in which he lived and also his character and the background to his writing. While Viardot was still alive she of course took great care of all the poet's belongings of which she understood the true significance. But what has become of them since? Will her descendants preserve these historic treasures with the necessary veneration? "

Finally I should like to cite one more mention of this diary to be found in Herman Lopatin's recollections of Turgenev: "That diary would make interesting reading. It must be with the Viardot family unless of course they have sold it for the money."

Such are the references to this diary made by Turgenev himself and also by people who knew him and were able with ample justification to maintain that throughout many years of his life between 1851 and 1882 the writer kept diaries which provided commentaries on literary and political events and which also contained interesting entries of a personal nature. On two occasions—in an article and in a letter to a friend Turgenev used quotations from his diaries of 1861 and 1877 respectively. Yet neither of these have been printed.

## II

On November 1, 1843, Turgenev made the acquaintance of Pauline Viardot when she was on tour in St. Petersburg. The importance of his love for her at that time emerges quite clearly from the letters which Turgenev wrote to her from his native country (to which he had returned after a long sojourn in France) on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of that meeting. On November 1, 1850 Turgenev wrote the following lines to Pauline Viardot: "Today I went to look at the house where for the first time I had the good fortune to meet you seven years ago. The house is on Nevsky Prospect opposite the Alexandrine Theatre; your apartment was right on the corner—do you remember? There are no memories in my whole life more dear to me than those linked with you.... It is so pleasant to sense within myself, after seven years have passed, the same profound, sincere, unchanging feeling towards you; this awareness uplifts and inspires me like a bright ray of sun. It would seem that I am destined to know happiness, if I have

proved worthy enough for the reflection of your life to mingle with mine. As long as I am alive I shall strive to be worthy of this happiness; I began to find self-respect once I bore this treasure within myself. You know that what I say to you is the *truth*, as true as human words could ever be.... I hope that reading these lines will bring you some pleasure ... now permit me to prostrate myself at your feet."

This letter Turgenev sent to Pauline Viardot after they had been apart for only a few months, and when he had no idea that their separation was to last a whole six years. Therefore there is every reason to believe that the diary that has not been handed down to us and which was begun in 1851 would have contained numerous passages devoted to the writer's emotional experiences linked with Pauline Viardot.

The manuscript of an autobiographical character, which may have been written on the basis of Turgenev's diary and of which almost nothing is known apart from the title *Living for Art* or *Art before All*, was undoubtedly wholly concerned with Pauline Viardot. This work Turgenev obviously decided not to print for strictly personal reasons and later Pauline Viardot and her children also did not risk making it public. Even if the singer's grandchildren did not destroy the manuscript, its content remains a secret to this day, eighty-seven years after Turgenev's death and sixty years after the singer's death.

Extant information on this manuscript can be summarised as follows.

Immediately after Pauline Viardot's death in Paris on May 5, 1910 (she died at the age of eighty-eight) articles started to appear in Russian newspapers on the fate of Turgenev's manuscripts. One of these reads as follows: "Now after Viardot's death what will be the fate of Turgenev's correspondence, his diary, his manuscripts, if only they are still intact, and the unfinished novel rumours of which have long since been circulating among his friends?" Five days later an article appeared in the Petersburg newspaper *Rech* (Speech) concerning an unexpected find in the house of Pauline Viardot. I cite the complete text of this article that was entitled *Turgenev's Unpublished Manuscript*.

"In a private letter sent to Petersburg, a relative of the deceased Pauline Viardot, Alfred Garcia, made it known that the manuscript of a novel by Turgenev that was lost, and not published either during the writer's lifetime or after his death, has recently been found in a secret drawer of Pauline Viardot's. The manuscript is a novel in two parts entitled *Living for Art*. It

is dedicated to Pauline Viardot and written in Turgenev's own hand. Three pages from the middle of the manuscript are missing. Together with the manuscript was found a note in Pauline Viardot's hand requesting that the novel should not be published until ten years after her death."

There is little doubt that similar announcements appeared in the French periodic press at that time. The above article gave rise to two subsequent ones, which, incidentally, are not recorded in writings on Turgenev. Both stem from the pen of well-known journalists.

*Turgenev's Novel* was the title chosen by Sergei Yablonsky for his sentimental, not to say sugary, article.

"In a secret drawer of Pauline Viardot's a manuscript of Turgenev's has been found. A novel by Turgenev about Turgenev's romance. A romance which he lived through and which he wrote about. Imagine the excitement at this piece of news?!" Thus opens Yablonsky's article which appeared the day after the first one. It presents the relationship between Turgenev and Viardot in an exclusively idyllic light. Yablonsky does not imagine for a moment that there could have ever been so much as the tiniest of clouds in their relationship. As for *Living for Art*, the journalist maintains that rumours in connection with this work of a definitely autobiographical character had been circulating for some time, and that ten years hence when Viardot's ban on its publication runs out "the old yellowed leaves will breathe forth spring, freshness and youth, all that we lack today."

A more sober tone is to be found in the article of another critic which appeared a month later in the same newspaper. After repeating that a Turgenev manuscript had been found in a secret drawer after Viardot's death D. V. Philosophov writes: "What we know of the relationship between Turgenev and Viardot is hearsay more than anything else. The true colour of that relationship is still unknown to us." Philosophov was quite right in this respect. His words are to a large extent still apt today. Philosophov considered that the extracts from the letters of Turgenev and Viardot which were published in the singer's lifetime had little bearing on the relationship as such, which gives him good reason to maintain that "the relationship between Turgenev and Viardot was too profound and serious for us to be able to judge it by mere 'extracts'". He goes on to make a suggestion, which, as my searchings have borne out, is the most correct approach to adopt in the circumstances: "Probably the rediscovered novel is not so much a novel as a

diary from which we might find out 'everything'. In ten years' time it is to be published. For this even we should be grateful, for Madame Viardot could just as well have written: 'I ask that this novel be printed a hundred years after my death.' And we would have waited a hundred years.... Then the question arises: where is the limit to the chaste ban on invading the private life of a writer? Surely, nothing could sully the name of Turgenev, or cast aspersions on his relationship with Viardot? What is more, if Madame Viardot's name is to go down in history it is more likely that she will be remembered as Turgenev's friend than as a singer. There is no limit to the degree to which people can draw a dividing line between the man and the writer, but the activity is mere formalism, particularly in Russia where writers are loved and admired precisely as individuals. It would seem to me that here there is no question of invading anyone's private life. Here we are not up against any morbid curiosity as regards the intimate side of this relationship, but the desire to love the whole man, to love not merely his greatness but also his weaknesses, the desire to understand him to the end, to embrace within our hearts his suffering, sorrows and his happiness."

If Philosophov's knowledge of Turgenev's life had been more detailed he could have substantiated his assumption that *Living for Art* was "not so much a novel as a diary" with several authoritative arguments. He failed to do this although he was clearly on the right track. It is also unfortunate that Philosophov did not take any steps to obtain more detailed information on Turgenev's manuscript. At that time, when the news was quite fresh, it would not have been a difficult task.

But now to return to the article in which information on *Living for Art* first appeared in print in Russia. The facts on which the article is based leave little room for doubt. Pauline Viardot's descendants must indeed have actually had this manuscript in their possession—there was after all no reason why they should have thought up the title or the fact that it consisted of two parts and that three pages were missing from the middle! In such matters there is absolutely no point in indulging in fabrications because their inventors stand to gain nothing from them.

It is thus quite clear that after Pauline Viardot's death a hitherto unknown Turgenev manuscript *was* discovered, which, if it was not actually the writer's diary, was without doubt an autobiographical work, based, we may well assume, on diary material.



Later information regarding this unknown manuscript complete with additional details of vague origin started appearing in German journals carrying material on Turgenev. In this connection literary historian Klaus Dornacher names a book by Paul Wiegler (*Geschichte der fremdsprachigen Weltliteratur*, München, 1949), which appeared in a number of editions between the years 1914 and 1949. This book contains the following passage concerning Turgenev's manuscript (see p. 534): "Still to be published is the novel-cum-confession *Art before All* in which Turgenev writes of Viardot and himself." A short reference is also to be found in a book by Heinrich Berl entitled *Baden-Baden im Zeitalter der Romantik* (Baden-Baden, 1936, p. 181). Expressing his regrets over *Living for Art*—as he refers to Turgenev's work—having not been published in German, Berl goes on to write: "If, as there is reason to believe, this novel was not written in Baden, the greater part of the plot is definitely set here.... It is most probable that the novel throws light on the relationship between three people which was in many respects strange: Viardot—Garcia—Turgenev. This relationship will always seem strange. Was it really simply 'living for art' or was there more to it? To be frank, I should say rather less!" The author of this book does not elaborate his claims that the greater part of the events referred to by Turgenev in the manuscript took place in Baden. Nor does Klaus Dornacher, who quotes Berl, draw attention to this. Thus the air of mystery surrounding this work of Turgenev's instead of being dispersed, thickened. None of the authors alluding to this Turgenev manuscript tried to find out what had inspired the work and what were the reasons underlying its composition. For an answer to these questions it is necessary to establish the link between this work and Turgenev's diaries.

The six years Turgenev spent in Russia were something of a turning-point in his relationship with Pauline Viardot. After a short meeting in March 1853 in Moscow, during the singer's last tour in Russia their correspondence is virtually broken off. Turgenev only sent her two letters in April and May of that year and only the first of these contains any emotional language: "The warmest of greetings to all good friends. To you I send ... but you know the feelings I cherish for you and which will endure until my death." (Letter from Spasskoye: April 17, 1853). The letter written in May was not only the last for that year—not a single other letter to Pauline Viardot is known to have been written while the writer remained in Russia. Of course, it is possible that these letters did not survive or that

nothing is known about their existence. In that case there would clearly be a reason why the addressee decided to refrain from publishing them.

Turgenev's state of mind when he left for Paris after that separation of six years is reflected in his letter to E. Lambert written on June 10, 1856: "Permission to leave the country heartens me ... yet at the same time I must confess that it would be better for me not to go. To go abroad at my age means to make an irrevocable choice of a wandering gypsy life and abandon all idea of a family. What's to be done! This seems to be what fate has in store for me." This letter filled with sadness also contains the following lines referring to Turgenev's imminent departure for Europe: "I am not counting any more on happiness for myself, that is on happiness in that *breathless* sense in which it fills young hearts; it is ridiculous to think about flowers when the flowering season is over.... When I look back to my past life it seems that I never did anything but chase after folly. Don Quixote at least believed in the beauty of his Dulcinea, yet the Don Quixotes of our age can see that their Dulcineas are ugly, but still chase after them." This remarkably frank letter clearly reflects Turgenev's thoughts about Pauline Viardot (incidentally the artist Alexei Bogolyubov referred to Viardot as "that ugly beauty"), about his relationship with her and the "other people's nest" to which the writer was planning to return after an interval of six years.

These profound emotions that Turgenev experienced at the time were the subject of his conversations with his closest friends, and later occupied a major place in his correspondence with people in whom he placed great confidence.

The most frank conversations on this subject are those Turgenev had with Nekrasov, it would seem; he used to meet him frequently in St. Petersburg from the end of 1853 onwards, after Turgenev had received from chief of police Orlov a "notice of freedom and permission to enter the capitals". A clear echo of these conversations is to be found in Nekrasov's letter of June 15, 1856, which he sent to Turgenev shortly before the latter's departure for Paris: "We are going abroad, but when I think of you I cannot help but recall the lines:

'Below, the blue waves dance and tremble;  
Above, the sun glows, bright and warm.  
And yet for storm it begs, the rebel,  
As if 'twas peace that lurked in storm!...'\*

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\* Translated by Irina Zheleznova.—Ed.

"But my dear fellow, haven't you been through enough already? How ever will you face leaving? Well, after all, it is not my affair. I do not venture to dissuade you, for I know I should have done the same in your place."

In another letter which Nekrasov sent Turgenev from Rome on December 18, 1856 (in reply to a letter from Turgenev that has not survived but was clearly written after he had spent three and a half months with the Viardot family) contains the following passage: "I am sorry for you, Turgenev, but there is no advice I can give. I know what feverish inaction is like—I understand everything. Both of us are equally pathetic in this respect."

An unexpectedly frank letter is the one written to Tolstoi from Paris on December 8—considering that the two men were not on particularly close terms: the thirty-eight-year-old Turgenev writes: "I am already too old not to have a 'nest' of my own, not to have a home to live in. In the spring I shall return to Russia without fail, although my departure from here will mean I shall be turning my back on my last dream of so-called happiness, or, to be more precise, a dream of light-heartedness stemming from a sense of fulfilment in my personal life. My 'precision' turned out extremely lengthy and perhaps far from precise, but that is how it is. What's to be done!"

Tolstoi's reply has not survived, but to judge by the entry in his diary in that connection it was dispatched on December 21, 1856 (January 2, 1857), and contained lines referring to rumours of Turgenev's marriage to Pauline Viardot. Turgenev replied from Paris on January 3 in the following vein: "What ridiculous rumours are being spread at home! Her husband is in the best of health, and I am as far from marriage as you, for instance. But I love her more than ever and more than anyone else on this earth, and that is quite true."

Turgenev's confession was of course prompted by the problematic relationship that had grown up between him and Pauline Viardot and that was constantly compelling him to make final decisions. On February 16, 1857 Turgenev wrote these lines to Herzen from Paris: "I am out of sorts because I am ill and not doing anything. I shall only recover when I leave Paris, which I shall be doing in a month when I plan to come over to England and visit you. Perhaps I shall feel better there. And then on to Russia where I shall take root to the end of time." The next day Turgenev sent Botkin the letter cited at the beginning of this article in which he requested that his manuscripts be destroyed: "I feel all the time like so much

rubbish that people have forgotten to sweep out.... I only hope this will pass when I leave Paris." These infinitely sad words are a true "*cri de cœur*". Later Turgenev refers to himself as "poisoned" and says to his friend: "When we meet I shall have a good deal to tell you, but I don't feel like putting it on paper." This, of course, is yet another reference to Turgenev's emotional dilemma in connection with Pauline Viardot. It was this dilemma that made Turgenev keep on about leaving Paris to which he had returned only six months previously after a six-year absence.

Yet despite the gruelling experiences Turgenev's attachment to Viardot not only persisted, but became still more profound. Nekrasov, who had arrived in Paris in the spring of 1857, wrote the following to Tolstoi after his meeting there with Turgenev: "The other day the subject of love came up and he (Turgenev) said to me: 'Now after fifteen years I still love that woman so much that I am ready to paint myself yellow and dance naked on the roof for her!' It was said so unexpectedly and so sincerely that my liking for him grew still deeper."

An echo of their conversations on this subject is to be found in another letter which Nekrasov sent to Turgenev in Sinzig after his return to Russia: "I am so glad that you feel the urge to work again. But think carefully before going back to Paris." On August 12 of that year Turgenev replied from the Viardot's house in Courtavenel to Nekrasov's exhortation to break off his relationship with Pauline in the following resolute tone: "You see I am here, in other words I am committing exactly that folly which you warned me against.... But it was impossible to act otherwise. Incidentally, the upshot of this folly will be that I shall be arriving in Petersburg earlier than planned. That is for sure: Life like this is impossible. There must be an end to perching on the edge of another person's nest. If I have none of my own, I shall have to do without one."

This despair at his unsatisfactory personal life is expressed with still more urgency in Turgenev's letter to Tolstoi dated March 27, 1858: "Oh, my dear Tolstoi, if you only knew how sad at heart and hopeless I feel. Learn from my example: do not let life slip through your fingers and may God spare you the knowledge that weighs heavy on me: life has passed me by without having even begun and all that awaits me is the uncertainty of youth and the barren emptiness of old age. How you should act so as to avoid this plight, I do not know; but perhaps you are not destined ever to experience it. At any rate be assured of my sincere wish that you may know the righteous

happiness of a righteous life. This wish comes to you from a man profoundly—yet deservedly—unhappy.”

Nowhere else did Turgenev ever express his longing to know the righteous happiness of a righteous life with such hopeless despair; indeed not only had he failed to reach this goal at the age of 39 but it eluded him for the rest of his life.

What was the reason for such pessimistic statements from Turgenev about the relationship which a few years earlier he had held so dear? Why was it that he returned to the bosom of the Viardot family, that should have been a real home for him, with such reluctance, despite his long absence? Why the leitmotif which we find again and again in his letters of that period? —“I should never have gone abroad again” (from a letter to Tolstoi dated January 17, 1858). Whence all the tragic suffering? Why did the senselessness of “perching on the edge of another person’s nest” come home to Turgenev at precisely that period?

While Turgenev was still in Russia, alarming news from abroad had called forth this despair. This was why he returned to Paris a worried man, realising that many things for him had changed in his absence. They had changed because he had most probably already learnt of Pauline Viardot’s infatuation with the Prince of Baden. A detailed account of this episode is to be found in the reminiscences of Alexei Bogolyubov in a record of a conversation he had with Annenkov: “This break was a grim experience for Turgenev but two years later their relationship was restored to its former footing and continued so until the end of his life.” Although there are some inaccuracies in Bogolyubov’s account, what he says about Pauline Viardot may well have corresponded to the true state of affairs. This would explain Heinrich Berl’s assumption that *Living for Art* was based on actual experiences in Baden-Baden.

Bogolyubov’s assertion that “two years later their relationship was restored to its former footing” is, however, not correct. It was two years later that Turgenev wrote to Lambert: “I am writing to you from the château of Madame Viardot: it’s name is Courtavenel and it is about thirty miles from Paris. I have recently returned from a visit to Vichy where I took the waters to good effect. I am in good health but my heart is heavy. I find myself in the midst of happy family life ... what am I doing here and why should I be turning my gaze backwards once more after having already decided to make a clean break with all that I held dear? You will understand quite well what I mean and the position I am now in. Yet I am not

troubled for they say that a man dies several times before his death.... I know what has died within me, so why do I remain behind to gaze upon a closed coffin? It is not that feelings have died within me; but ... the hope of their finding fulfilment has...." Similar thoughts are expressed in Turgenev's letter to Maria Markovich who wrote under the pen-name of Marco Vovchok: "Outside a family or away from one's native land there is no happiness; let everyone sit in his nest and find roots in his native soil.... What point is there in clinging to the edge of another person's nest? ... We shall talk about all this one day" (July 10, 1859).

There is every reason to presume that Turgenev wrote a detailed account of the drama he went through in the latter part of the 1850s in his diary. Perhaps his diary also included the letters he never dispatched to Pauline Viardot in which jealousy went hand in hand with a sense of hopeless desolation. This motif may then have found its way into the manuscript *Living for Art*, which must have been the fruit of Turgenev's profound reflection on his personal life and on the anguish which fell to his lot in those years. The plausibility of this assumption with regard to the content of *Living for Art* is indirectly borne out by Nekrasov's words to Turgenev about "feverish inaction". In that state of mind Turgenev would only have been able to write up his diary while creative writing would have been out of the question. Here one cannot help but call to mind the passage quoted earlier from Turgenev's conversation with Pavlovsky on the need for a writer never to abandon his pen whatever the circumstances in which he finds himself: "If, for instance, a great sorrow befalls you—sit down and record it: such and such happened, such and such were my reactions. The tragedy will pass, while the invaluable record will remain: sometimes a page of this sort can provide the nucleus of a major work, which will be of artistic value precisely because it is true to life, part of life's living flesh." There is reason to believe that when Turgenev said this to Pavlovsky he had in mind precisely the tragedy which Pauline Viardot had brought to his life and its possible result, passages in his diary, and subsequently the work *Living for Art*.

To our great loss the manuscript of *Living for Art* has not been discovered to this day. Ten years ago it was noted in the press that according to information available at the State Turgenev Museum in Orel an announcement of the discovery of the manuscript and the possibility of its publication had appeared in the *Journal de Genève*. However, the information

was not confirmed after more thorough investigation. In a letter I received on March 15, 1963, one of the editors of that paper, Monsieur Vadier wrote: "I have examined most carefully all the literary pages published in our journal since 1951 but there is not a single article about Turgenev.... I have asked all my colleagues and all members of the journal staff connected in any way with material on Russian literature in our columns. But they all shake their heads, saying it is impossible that such an article was printed for it would have immediately caught their attention." The author of the letter goes on to say that the possibility cannot be excluded of such information having appeared in the newspaper "in the distant past". Noting with regret that the data were "too vague and meagre" Monsieur Vadier compared this search with looking for a piece of sugar in the Indian ocean. The letter from the *Journal de Genève* concludes with the following words: "Believe me, I am at a loss. I would be proud to find out something definite and concrete.... Please believe that I have taken very much to heart this most interesting and tantalising story."

Let us hope that the manuscript *Living for Art* will be discovered after all, and that then we shall perhaps be able to acquaint ourselves with a major part of Turgenev's diary and his tragic confession.

### III

For many a long year Alexei Remizov, who had been living in Paris since 1924, had a small manuscript in his keeping, by which he set great store, because he held it to be part of Turgenev's diary. Shortly before his death (in 1957) Remizov made a present of the manuscript to his pupil the writer Natalya Kodryanskaya, with instructions that she should have it printed. In 1961 Natalya Kodryanskaya, on learning that work was under way on a volume entitled *From Ivan Turgenev's Paris Archives*, informed us of this intriguing manuscript warning us that it could hardly be part of the original of Turgenev's diary. Kodryanskaya agreed to send a photocopy of the first page of the manuscript. This was enough for me to conclude that we were dealing with a copy of the original diary. On receiving photocopies of the remaining pages and then the manuscript itself, I was in a position to establish conclusively that the manuscript was a copy of the diary which Turgenev had kept between November 27, 1882, and January 17, 1883. The only

disappointing thing about the manuscript was that there were gaps in it and certain words were clearly inaccurate or misreadings. But where was the original of these entries? The answer to this problem was fortunately close to hand: nobody had paid attention to the fact that the original pages were among the papers listed as far back as 1930 by Professor André Mazon in his invaluable book *Manuscripts parisiens d'Ivan Tourguénev*. On page 103 of this book in the section headed "Biographical Papers" there are entries from Turgenev's diaries for the same dates as those in the copy I had received. The original consisted of eight small pages torn out of a small notebook. At the end of the classification of this fragment is a remark to the effect that it was soon to be the subject of a special publication. Over thirty years had passed since then and the manuscript had yet to be published.

At the beginning of the 1950s all Turgenev's papers listed and classified in André Mazon's book and which had previously belonged to Pauline Viardot's descendants were made over to the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale. This collection of papers is now the largest collection of Turgenev's manuscripts in the world. With the kind assistance of Professor Mazon I was able to obtain photocopies of the manuscript of the diary.

These few small pages are all that has come down to us so far of the multitude of diaries that once existed, diaries which Turgenev kept most probably—with various intervals—for the best part of thirty years. The surviving entries which were published for the first time complete with detailed commentaries in Volume 73 of the series *Literaturnoye Nasledstvo* that is entitled *From I. S. Turgenev's Paris Archives* cover a period of seven weeks, although there are entries for only six specific days, days when Turgenev felt that life was ebbing from him, when he thought of himself as half-dead. The diary shows the interest which Turgenev still took in political and literary events, since he still found time for meetings with friends and acquaintances and, albeit at the cost of great effort, conversed with them.

The very first sentence in this extract is of interest: "Despite my presentiments I am starting on a new notebook." So not long beforehand, perhaps only a matter of a few days, as can be inferred from subsequent lines, Turgenev had completed the preceding "notebook". Where that one is, however, remains a mystery.

The extant pages of the "new notebook", which may well have been the last, are filled with details of events and musings



that preoccupied Turgenev at that particular period. These preoccupations are first and foremost of a literary nature. It was during those very same weeks that Turgenev's *Poems in Prose* and the story *Klara Milich* appeared in the last issue of the journal *Vestnik Evropy* for 1882 and the first for the following year. Turgenev followed with interest the "opinion of the public and critics". He was gratified to learn that the *Poems* had been a success. Turgenev was particularly heartened by "Lev Tolstoi's approval". With satisfaction he noted that "here" (in Paris) a translation of some of the *Poems* published in the *Revue politique et littéraire* had been well received, and that they were also being translated into Italian, Czech and German.

At this period, as indeed throughout the whole of his life, Turgenev continued to assist young writers, some of whom were living in desperate poverty in Paris.

Of especial interest is the fact that these fragments bear out the attraction Turgenev held for members of the Russian revolutionary movement who had escaped from prison or had fled to Paris in order to avoid arrest. Some of them were trying to obtain university education abroad or start out on careers as writers while others sought material help. Turgenev tried to help them all: he wrote the preface for a story of Isaac Pavlovsky's, found work for Nikolai Tsakni who needed to earn his living, namely a translation of a novel by Maupassant for the journal *Russky Vestnik*, helped Nikolai Payevsky find a publisher for his stories in Paris and paved the way for Adelaida Lukanina's works of fiction to be published in Russia; he used to receive Nadezhda Skvortsova-Mikhailovskaya who at the beginning of the seventies had been active in Chaikovsky's revolutionary circle\*. On several occasions Turgenev also afforded material assistance to Vladimir Meyer who had been convicted at the "Trial of the 193" but succeeded in escaping abroad, and who by then was ill with consumption. Thus we find mention of six Russian revolutionaries Turgenev met in those weeks. It is quite possible that others visited him during the period in question as well, whose names for some reason were not noted in his diary. Evidence of Turgenev's acquaintance and talks with another young revolutionary—Lev Buch—at the beginning of 1882 is provided by the letter of recommendation Turgenev sent to Vassili Vereshchagin, the son of the famous artist. In the same year Turgenev took truly sympathetic interest in the fate of

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\* A group of young Populists named after one of its members, Nikolai Chaikovsky, though he was not its organiser or leader.—Ed.

another young revolutionary, Israel Shpolyansky. Shortly prior to that Turgenev had given invaluable help to such members of the revolutionary movement of the seventies as Vladimir Lutsky and Samuil Klyachko. On one occasion Turgenev even went so far as to send a written petition to the Minister of the Interior Loris-Melikov and the Chief of Police Drenteln on behalf of a number of persons living abroad. All this without even mentioning Turgenev's long-term contacts with the well-known revolutionaries Pyotr Lavrov, Hermann Lopatin, Sergei Stepnyak-Kravchinsky, Nikolai Chaikovsky, Pyotr Kropotkin, and his help to such émigrés as Mikhail Dragomanov, Anna Kuleshova-Rosenstein, Mikhail Ashkenazi and Vladimir Gintovt-Dzevaltovsky.

In short, these entries in Turgenev's diaries add much to existing information on Turgenev's contacts with the leaders of the Russian revolutionary movement.

Turgenev is seen also to find time for meetings with artists, which reflects once again his great love of the fine arts which was to accompany him right through his life. On two occasions Ivan Pokhitonov shows him his latest works which Turgenev describes as "wonderful", and with reference to the portrait of Turgenev he had just started work on, the writer comments: "It is turning out extraordinarily well and the likeness is remarkable. A real master!" With a sense of warm gratitude Turgenev recalls the "excellent illustrations" by Vasnetsov and Surikov for his story *The Quail* and Tolstoi's *What Men Live For* which had just come out in St. Petersburg as a separate publication.

To judge by these pages, during that period Turgenev was visited not only by many Russian friends and acquaintances but also by foreign writers and politicians. Maupassant read him part of his novel *Une Vie*, which he found "remarkable". Emile Augier acquainted Turgenev with his latest play. On the same day as the Bulgarian revolutionary Plevako, whom Turgenev terms "an interesting figure", the progressive French historian and publicist Henri Martin visited the Russian novelist. The eminent French philologist Gaston Paris amended at Turgenev's request the French translation of the *Poems in Prose*; Turgenev derived great pleasure from his conversation with the French art historian Hyppolite Taine; finally Turgenev describes as "a most interesting American" John Hay, former Under-Secretary of State.

In addition to these interesting encounters in Paris, Turgenev continues to keep careful track of life in Russia, which is constantly in his thoughts. "In Russia there is a decline in trade

(especially in grain), a decline in financial affairs and student unrest." He angrily attacks the reactionary policies of the tsarist government that was stifling all free expression and banishing all its opponents: "The situation in Russia is becoming ever grimmer. Feoktistov (that arch-scoundrel) has been put in charge of the press. Mikhailovsky and Shelgunov\* have been exiled." Grand Prince Konstantin Nikolayevich, who was living in Paris at the time, is dismissed in Turgenev's diary in short expressive terms: "But what a nonentity after all!"—despite the fact that he paid a visit to the writer during which he "showered pleasantries".

All these details in this fragment of Turgenev's diaries are interspersed with references to his illness and the operation he was soon to undergo. If we take into account that these seven weeks also involved a good deal of activity and were rich in impressions relating to both Turgenev's literary work and private life that he did not mention in his diary (for example, he sent off over seventy letters and probably received twice that number), then we can form some idea of the full life which the writer was leading even when time was running out and he was subject to so much physical pain.

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Turgenev's last diary gives us good reason to assume that his diaries of the fifties, sixties and seventies would have been extremely rich in content. They would naturally have provided first-class material for his biographers and for literary historians engaged in analysis of his work and would have enhanced our knowledge of Turgenev the man beyond measure. There is little doubt that the diaries contained a great deal of interesting material on contemporary literary and political affairs in Russia and Western Europe. Then again it goes without saying that they would have immortalised Turgenev's feelings for Pauline Viardot which brought him so much profound suffering.

It is to be hoped that the first publication of this fragment of Turgenev's diary will lead on to the discovery and publication of others, more significant passages of this as yet unknown part of Turgenev's literary legacy.

First and foremost there is the hope that the manuscript of *Living for Art* will come to light, since it was definitely

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\* Two prominent publicists and literary critics, active in the democratic movement of the '60s.

preserved and not destroyed by either Turgenev or Pauline Viardot. After all, this particular manuscript was only lost trace of in 1910.

Turgenev's diaries are an intrinsic part of his literary legacy. It is essential that every effort be made to find all those books of Turgenev's diary which have not been destroyed and that they be made accessible to the reading public.



## ANNA DOSTOYEVSKAYA

Anna Grigorievna Dostoyevskaya (1846—1918), the wife and loyal friend of the great author, carried out the gigantic task of collecting and putting in order Fyodor Dostoyevsky's literary heritage. After his death she published seven editions of his collected works, the last in 1906. In the same year the unique *Bibliographical Index of Compositions and Works of Art Connected with the Life and Literary Career of Dostoyevsky* compiled by Anna Dostoyevskaya was brought out. She set up the Dostoyevsky's museum house in Staraya Russa, and organised a special Dostoyevsky Room at the History Museum, which later served as the basis for the Dostoyevsky Museum in Moscow. We also owe to Anna Dostoyevskaya a book of reminiscences which holds a special place in the vast and contradictory mass of literature about this writer.

Leonid Leonidov, a prominent Russian actor, described his impressions of a meeting with Anna Dostoyevskaya in these words: "I saw and heard 'something' that was unlike anything I had known, and through this 'something', through this ten-minute encounter, through his widow, I got a perception of Dostoyevsky; a hundred books about him would not have given me so much as this brief meeting. I felt I was in his, Dostoyevsky's, presence." An equally vivid picture can be gleaned from Anna Dostoyevskaya's reminiscences. This book includes the opening chapters, which tell of her acquaintance with and marriage to Fyodor Dostoyevsky.



Серг. Юсуповские





Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Photograph. 1879



Anna Dostoyevskaya. Photograph. 1871



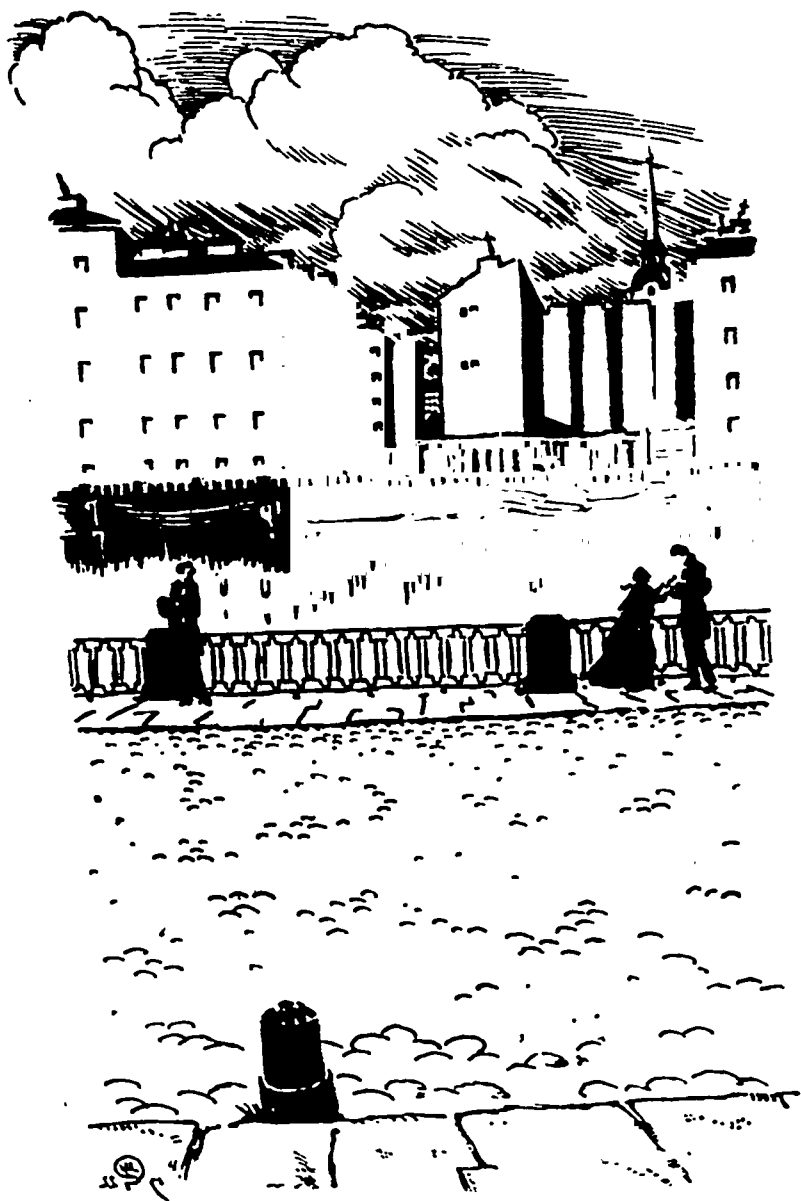


Illustration by M. Dobuzhinsky to F. Dostoyevsky's  
*White Nights*. 1922



Illustration by M. Roiters to F. Dostoyevsky's novel  
*The Teen-ager*. 1947



Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Engraving by V. Favorsky. 1929



## REMINISCENCES

### *Preface\**

In the past I never even contemplated the idea of writing any memoirs. Quite apart from the fact that I was well aware of my lack of any literary talent I had been so busy for most of my life preparing my dear husband's works for publication that I had hardly ever had time to spend on other matters connected with his memory.

In 1910, when, on account of ill health, I was obliged to hand over to someone else my publishing activities and, at my doctors' insistence, to go and live away from the capital, I felt a tremendous gap in my life which I had to fill with some absorbing work, otherwise I was convinced my will to live would soon desert me.

Living as I did then in complete solitude and only taking a remote interest in current affairs I gradually began to turn my thoughts to the past and to feelings which had brought me so much happiness, and this helped me to forget the emptiness and aimlessness of my present existence.

On re-reading my husband's notebooks and my own I came across such interesting details that I found myself anxious to record them, not in shorthand as they had originally been noted down, but for the general reader, in particular since I was convinced that they might well be of interest to my children and grandchildren and perhaps also to some admirers of my husband's talent anxious to find out what kind of man Fyodor Mikhailovich was at home in his family surroundings.

The reminiscences which I prepared in this way at various times in the course of the last five winters (1911–1916) already fill a number of exercise books which I have attempted to put into some kind of order.

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\* These memoirs are presented in abridged form.—*Ed.*



I make no claim for these reminiscences as diverting reading but I can vouch for their veracity and complete impartiality in their description of the actions of various persons involved. The reminiscences are based for the most part on notes substantiated by references in letters and articles that appeared in newspapers and journals.

I do not attempt to conceal the fact that the reminiscences are often defective from the literary point of view: in places the narrative is long drawn out, the chapters vary greatly in length and the style is old-fashioned, to name but a few of the shortcomings. However, it is no easy undertaking to learn a new skill at the age of seventy and I trust that these errors will be forgiven in view of the sincerity and heartfelt desire to present Fyodor Dostoyevsky to my readers complete with all his merits and faults, as he was in his family and private life.

### *My First Meeting with Dostoyevsky. Marriage*

#### *I*

On October 3, 1866 I arrived at the Sixth Boys Gymnasium at seven o'clock as usual to hear the next of P.M. Olkhin's lectures in stenography. The lecture had not yet started as the assembled company was waiting for the latecomers. I sat down in my usual place and was just starting to unpack my exercise books when Olkhin came up and sat down next to me on the bench.

"Anna Grigorievna, what would you say to doing some work as a stenographer?" he asked. "I have been asked to find a stenographer and I thought that you would perhaps like to take on the work."

"I'd like to very much," I replied, "I've been longing for a chance to start work. The only thing that worries me is whether I know my shorthand well enough to take on such a responsible task."

Olkhin reassured me saying that he thought the work in question did not demand speeds greater than those I had already mastered.

"For whom am I to work?" I inquired.

"For the writer Dostoyevsky. At the moment he is working on a new novel which he plans to write with the help of a stenographer. Dostoyevsky thinks that the novel will be about

seven signatures of large format in length and he is offering fifty roubles for the whole project."

I eagerly agreed to the terms. Dostoyevsky was a name that had been familiar to me since my childhood: he had been my father's favourite writer. I myself had been a great admirer of his works and his *Notes From the House of the Dead* had had me in tears. The prospect not only of making the acquaintance of a talented writer but also of helping him in his work made me happy and extremely excited.

Olkhin handed me a small piece of paper folded in four on which was written: "Alonkin House on the corner of Stolyarny Lane and Malaya Meshchanskaya Street, Flat No. 13 (ask for Dostoyevsky)" adding at the same time: "Please go round to see Dostoyevsky tomorrow at half past eleven, 'no earlier, no later' as he himself stipulated to me today." Then Olkhin told me his opinion of Dostoyevsky, to which I shall refer later in my story.

Olkhin looked at his watch and walked over to the lecturer's desk. I must confess that on that occasion the lecture was a complete waste of time for me: I was simply bubbling over with happy excitement at the thought that at last my long-cherished dream had come true: I had found some work! If even Olkhin, our strict and demanding teacher, found that I was well enough versed in stenography and my speeds were adequate, then it must be so, otherwise he would never have recommended me for the work. This thought made me very happy and gave me more self-confidence.

I felt that I had embarked on a new path, could now earn money through my own efforts and had gained my independence—an infinitely precious goal to me, a young girl of the sixties. However, still more pleasant and more important than the idea of work as such was the chance of working with Dostoyevsky and becoming personally acquainted with that writer.

On returning home I told my mother all about the unexpected offer. She too was very happy at my success. Excitement kept me awake almost all night and I kept imagining to myself what Dostoyevsky would be like. Thinking of him as a contemporary of my father I assumed that he would be a man well on in years. I conjured up a picture of a fat, bald old man one moment, and a tall thin one the next, but always stern and gloomy as Olkhin had described him. The thought of how I was to talk to him worried me most of all. I thought of Dostoyevsky as such a learned, clever man that I started trembling over my every word in advance. I was also haunted by the thought that I could not be sure I knew all the first names

and patronymics of the heroes in his novels and I felt quite sure that he would start talking about them. There being no outstanding writers in my circle of friends I imagined them to be some race of men apart, conversation with whom demanded a special language of its own. When I think back to those times I realise what an absolute child I was despite my twenty years.

## II

On October 4th, the memorable day of my first meeting with my future husband I woke up in high spirits, excited at the thought that my long-cherished dream was about to come true: from school-girl or student I was to make the transition to independent worker in the profession of my choice.

I left home in good time so as to be able first of all to go to the main shopping arcade to stock up with some spare pencils and also to buy myself a small document case which I thought would lend my young person a more businesslike air. By eleven o'clock I had completed my purchases and so as to arrive "no earlier, no later"\* than the appointed time I started walking slowly to my destination by way of Bolshaya Meshchanskaya Street and Stolyarny Lane glancing constantly at my watch the while. At twenty-five minutes past eleven I walked up to Alonkin House and asked the yard-keeper standing in the archway where flat No. 13 was. He pointed to the right where there was a door opening onto a staircase. The house was a large one containing a whole host of tiny lodgings inhabited by merchants and artisans. Immediately the house in which Raskolnikov, the hero of *Crime and Punishment*, had lived came to mind.

Flat No. 13 was on the first floor. In answer to my ring the door was immediately opened by an elderly servant with a green checked shawl round her shoulders. Having read *Crime and Punishment* shortly before I could not help thinking to myself that perhaps her shawl had provided the model for the one which had played such an important role in the fate of the Marmeladov family. When the servant asked whom I wished to see I answered to the effect that Olkhin had sent me and that her master had been warned of my coming.

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\* This expression was characteristic of Fyodor Mikhailovich who hated losing time waiting for people and liked fixing exact times for meetings always following up such arrangements with the exhortation: "No earlier, no later".—*Auth.*

Before I had even taken off my hood the door into the hall was opened and against the background of the brightly lit room I caught sight of a young man with tousled jet-black hair wearing slippers and a shirt open at the neck. On seeing an unfamiliar face he let out a gasp of surprise and immediately disappeared into a side door.\*

The servant showed me into the next room which happened to be the dining room. It was furnished rather modestly: there were two large trunks against the wall covered with small rugs and a chest of drawers by the window adorned with a white crochet runner. Against the opposite wall there was a couch and on the wall above that a clock. I noticed with satisfaction that at that very moment it was exactly half-past eleven.

The servant woman asked me to sit down saying that her master would be with me any minute. And indeed two minutes later in came Fyodor Mikhailovich. He took me through into his study, and withdrew for a moment, as it emerged later, to ask for some tea to be served for us.

Fyodor Mikhailovich's study was a large room with two windows, and on that sunny day it was very light, although at times it could appear gloomy and oppressively quiet, when the half-light and silence weighed heavy.

At the far end of the room there was a small divan with a brown rather faded cover on it and in front of the divan was a round table complete with a red cotton centrepiece. On the table there was a lamp and two or three albums; armchairs and upholstered upright chairs were placed around it. Above the divan hung a portrait of an extremely thin woman set in a walnut frame; she was wearing a black dress and a black cap. "That must be Dostoyevsky's wife," I thought to myself, not knowing that he was a widower.

A large mirror in a black frame hung on the wall between the two windows. The space was considerably wider than the mirror and it had been placed over by the right window so that the effect was most unattractive. On each of the windowsills there was a large, beautifully shaped Chinese vase. Against the wall was a couch covered in green leather and next to that a small table with a carafe of water on it. Opposite this on the other side of the room there was a desk standing sideways on to the wall and it was at this that I was later always to sit when taking dictation from Fyodor Mikhailovich. The furnishings

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\* This is a reference to Dostoyevsky's stepson Pavel Alexandrovich Isaev, son of his first wife Maria Dmitrievna Isaeva.—*Ed.*

were nothing out of the ordinary and resembled those I was used to seeing in the households of the not-so-prosperous.

I was sitting there listening for sounds of life from outside the study door. I thought that any moment I would hear children's cries or the beating of a toy drum: or the door would open to reveal the thin lady whose portrait I had just been scrutinising.

But it was Fyodor Mikhailovich who came in, apologising that he had been detained. He began by asking how long I had been learning stenography.

"Only six months," I answered.

"Does your teacher have a large number of pupils?"

"At the beginning over a hundred and fifty enrolled but now there are only about twenty-five left."

"Why so few?"

"A good number thought that stenography was something very simple to learn, and when they realised that they couldn't master it in a matter of days they abandoned the course."

"It's the same with every new thing people take up here," commented Fyodor Mikhailovich, "they rush at something wildly enthusiastic, but their enthusiasm quickly subsides and then they give up. They see that hard work is involved and who is willing to work hard nowadays?"

At first glance Dostoyevsky appeared to me definitely middle-aged. But as soon as he started talking he seemed younger all of a sudden, and I thought to myself that he couldn't possibly be more than thirty-five or thirty-seven. He was of medium height and held himself very upright. His light brown hair that had red lights in it, was generously oiled and meticulously combed. What struck me most of all about him was his eyes; they were different: one was brown and the other had an enlarged pupil that blocked out almost the whole of the iris.\* This difference between his eyes lent Dostoyevsky's gaze an enigmatic air. His face that looked pale and betrayed ill health seemed most familiar, probably because I had seen portraits of him earlier. He was wearing a dark blue cloth jacket that was rather worn; his collar and cuffs on the other hand were of a dazzling white.

Five minutes later the maid came in again with two glasses of very strong, almost black tea. There were two rolls on the tray as well. I took one of the tea-glasses. I did not want any tea

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\* In a fall that occurred during one of Dostoyevsky's epileptic fits he damaged his right eye against some sharp object.—*Auth.*

and, what was more, it was very hot in the room but, so as not to appear ungrateful, I started to drink. I was sitting next to the wall at the little table but Dostoyevsky one minute sat down at the writing-desk and the next started pacing up and down the room smoking. While doing so he kept on putting his cigarette out and lighting a new one. He offered me a cigarette but I declined.

"Perhaps, you're just refusing out of politeness?" he proffered.

I hastened to assure him that I not only did not smoke myself, but did not like seeing ladies smoke at all.

Our conversation proceeded in fits and starts, and Dostoyevsky moreover kept leaping from one subject to the next. He looked worn out and ill. Before we had exchanged more than a few sentences he announced that he was an epileptic and that he had had a fit a few days previously, and this frankness surprised me. With regard to our future work he mentioned in passing so to speak:

"We'll see how things work out, we'll experiment and see how we get on, shall we?"

I began to get the feeling that our collaboration would never materialise. I fancied that Dostoyevsky was already having doubts as to whether such a method would be suitable for his purposes and perhaps he contemplated abandoning the plan. So as to help him decide, I said:

"Very well, we shall have a try, but if working with me proves inconvenient for you, please do not hesitate to tell me at once. I shall not be at all offended."

Dostoyevsky suggested that for a trial run I should take dictation from him out of the newspaper *Russian Herald* and then reproduce the shorthand report in longhand. He started extremely quickly but I stopped him, asking that he should dictate no faster than ordinary speech.

Then I started to reproduce my shorthand report in longhand which I managed to do fairly rapidly. Yet Dostoyevsky kept hurrying me, worried that I was taking too long over it.

I reassured him though, saying that I would be doing that part of the work at home and therefore it should not worry him how long I take over it.

After looking through what I had written Dostoyevsky noticed that I had missed out a full stop, that one of my capitals was not clear and for this he reprimanded me harshly. He was obviously in an agitated state and finding it difficult to

collect his thoughts. One moment he was asking me what my name was only to forget it almost immediately, and the next he would start pacing up and down the room as if he had forgotten about me being there at all. I sat there not daring to stir lest I should disturb his train of thought.

Finally Dostoyevsky said that he was definitely not in a fit state to give me any dictation just then, inquiring at the same time whether I could come again the same evening at about eight o'clock. Then he would start dictating the novel. It was most inconvenient for me to have to come a second time, but, anxious not to postpone our work, I agreed to his proposal.

As I was leaving, Dostoyevsky asked: "I was glad when Olkhin suggested sending round a girl for this work rather than a man, and do you know why?"

"No, why?"

"Well, a man would have been bound to take to drink over it, but you I hope will do no such thing."

I thought that remark most amusing, but controlled my smile as I replied in a serious tone of voice: "No, I shall not take to drink: you may be quite sure of that."

### III

I left Dostoyevsky's house in a very dejected mood. I felt I did not like him, and the impression he had made on me had been a depressing one. I thought to myself that our work together was unlikely to prove satisfactory and my dreams of independence seemed to have vanished into thin air already. This was all the more disheartening seeing that my kind Mamma had been so happy to see me embarking on real work at last.

It was about two o'clock when I left Dostoyevsky's house and I lived too far away for there to be any sense in my going home and then coming back again: I lived near the Smolny Institute on Kostromskaya Street in a house belonging to my mother, Anna Nikolayevna Snitkina. I decided to go and call on some relatives who lived in Fonarny Lane, have my dinner with them and then return to work with Dostoyevsky in the evening.

My relatives showed a keen interest in my new acquaintance and plied me with questions about Dostoyevsky. The time passed quickly as we talked, and eight o'clock found me once more walking up to Alonkin House. When the maid opened the door to me I asked how I should address her master for although I knew his Christian name was Fyodor, having seen it

in his books, I did not know what his patronymic was. Fedosya (as the maid was called) asked me to wait in the dining room, as I had done on the previous occasion, while she went to tell her master I had arrived. When she came back she showed me into the study. I greeted Fyodor Mikhailovich and sat down at the place I had been shown to before at the small table. This did not suit Fyodor Mikhailovich, however, and he suggested I should sit down at the large desk assuring me that I should find it more comfortable to write at. I must confess that I felt highly flattered at his suggestion that I should sit at the very table, where not so long ago he had been working at such a talented work as *Crime and Punishment*.

I went to sit at the desk while Fyodor Mikhailovich sat down at the small table. Again he asked me what my name and patronymic were and whether I happened to be related to the talented young writer Snitkin who had died not long before. I replied that we merely bore the same name. After that he started to ask me about the members of my family, where I had gone to school and what led me to take up stenography, etc.

To all these questions I gave simple and serious, almost stern answers, as Fyodor Mikhailovich was to assure me later. I had long since decided that if I was to take on stenographic work in private houses it was important that from the outset I should set the tone of future relations, making sure that everything was on a businesslike footing and avoiding any kind of familiarity, so that it should never occur to anybody to take any liberties with me. It appears that I did not smile even once while talking to Fyodor Mikhailovich and that my serious manner made a most favourable impression on him. He admitted to me later that he had been favourably surprised by my appropriately decorous manner. In society he was used to meeting nihilist women whose behaviour shocked him. So he was most gratified to encounter in me the very opposite of the then predominant type of independent young woman.

Meanwhile Fedosya was making tea in the dining room and soon brought in two glasses of tea, two rolls and some lemon. Fyodor Mikhailovich once more offered me a cigarette and then passed me a plate of pears.

Over tea our conversation assumed a more cordial and friendly tone. All of a sudden it was as if I had known Fyodor Mikhailovich for years and I felt pleasantly at ease with him.

For some reason the conversation turned to the members of the Petrashevsky circle and the death sentences dealt out to certain of their number. Fyodor Mikhailovich became carried



away with his reminiscences: "I remember standing there on the Semyonovsky parade-ground among my fellow-prisoners watching preparations being made for our execution and knowing that I only had five minutes left to live. Yet those minutes seemed to stretch into infinity, as if I still had years, whole decades to live! We were already dressed for execution and drawn up in rows of three: I was eighth in order and in the third row.\* The first three were being tied to the posts. In two or three minutes the first two rows would have been shot and then would come our turn. By God, how I longed to live! How precious life seemed to me, how much that was good and worthwhile I felt I could accomplish! All my past came flooding back to me, and memories of how I had not always made the best use of it. How I longed to experience everything all over again and live a long, long life.... Suddenly I heard a retreat sounded and took heart. My comrades were untied, led back to their places, and then a new sentence was read out: I was sentenced to four years' hard labour. I can remember no other day that brought me so much happiness! I was soon walking up and down my casemate in the Alexeyev Fortress singing, singing for all I was worth, so thrilled I was to have had my life given back to me! Later my brother was admitted to say good-bye to me before my departure and on Christmas Eve we set off on our long journey. I still have the letter which I wrote to my late brother on the day my sentence was commuted, for my nephew returned it to me not long ago!"\*\*

I found Fyodor Mikhailovich's story quite harrowing, shivers had gone down my spine. Yet at the same time I was most surprised at how frank he was being with me, a mere slip of a girl whom he had never set eyes on before that morning. This man who appeared at first glance reserved and somewhat forbidding was telling me about his past in such detail and with such outspokenness that I could not but marvel at it. Only later when I learnt the circumstances in which he was then living, did

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\* The members of the Petrashevsky circle had their bogus sentence read to them on December 22, 1849, on the Semyonovsky parade ground in St. Petersburg. Dostoyevsky informed his brother in a letter written on the day of the execution that he had been in the second row of prisoners and those in the first were already tied up, and about to be shot when the real sentence to hard labour had been announced.—*Ed.*

\*\*i.e., the letter dated December 22, 1849, which Mikhail Dostoyevsky's son returned to the writer.

I understand the reason for this trusting frankness: at the time Fyodor Mikhailovich was quite alone and surrounded by persons hostilely disposed to him.\* He felt a desperate need to share his thoughts with someone in whom he sensed kind and considerate understanding. His frankness on that first day of our acquaintance truly delighted me.

Our conversation kept moving on from one subject to another, and we had not even started to do any work. This worried me for it was growing late and I had a long way to travel home. I had promised my mother to return straight home after leaving Dostoyevsky and by this time I feared she would be worrying about me. I was reluctant to remind Fyodor Mikhailovich of the purpose of my visit, and I was very glad when he remembered why I was there himself and suggested that we embark on dictation. I made ready, and then Fyodor Mikhailovich started walking diagonally up and down the room with rather rapid steps from the door to the stove and each time he reached the latter he would rap twice on it. He was smoking as he did so, frequently discarding a half-smoked cigarette in the ashtray on the edge of the desk.

After dictating for a while Fyodor Mikhailovich asked me to read out to him what I had taken down. Before I had read back more than a few words he stopped me, asking: "What's that—'come back from Roulettenburg'? \*\* Did I really say Roulettenburg? "

"Yes, Fyodor Mikhailovich, you dictated that word."

"Impossible! "

"Excuse me, but is there a town of that name in your novel? "

"Yes, the action takes place in a gambling resort which I have called Roulettenburg."

"If there is a town of that name, you must have dictated the word, for where could I have got it from otherwise? "

"You are right," admitted Fyodor Mikhailovich, "I must have been thinking of something else."

I was very gratified that this misunderstanding had been

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\* After the death of his first wife and brother Mikhail Dostoyevsky really was "quite alone" and "hounded" by creditors in connection with debts incurred through the publication of the journals *Vremya* (Time) and *Epokha* (Epoch).—Ed.

\*\*Later the opening of the novel was altered to read: "Finally I returned after an absence of a fortnight. The rest of the household had arrived in Roulettenburg three days previously."—Auth.

cleared up so easily. I thought to myself that Fyodor Mikhailovich must have been too preoccupied with his own thoughts and perhaps he had had a tiring day which would account for his mistake. He himself noticed this and said that he could no longer continue dictation and asked me to bring him a longhand copy of what he had just dictated at twelve o'clock the next day. I promised to have it done.

The clock struck eleven and I made ready to leave. On learning that I lived in the Pesky district Fyodor Mikhailovich said that he had never happened to visit that part of the city and that he had no idea where it was. If it was a long way off he could send a servant to escort me. I declined the offer, naturally. Fyodor Mikhailovich saw me to the door and bade Fedosya to light my way down the stairs.

At home I recounted to Mamma the thrilling day I had had: telling her how frank and kind Dostoyevsky had been, but so as not to distress her I concealed the depressing feeling the day had left me with, the like of which I had never experienced before. The impression had indeed been grim: for the first time in my life I had encountered a clever, kind but wretchedly unhappy man, abandoned by everyone, as it were. My heart was filled with a deep sense of sympathy and pity....

I was very tired by this time and went to bed at once, after asking to be woken earlier than usual, so that I should have time to copy out what Fyodor Mikhailovich had dictated, and deliver it at the appointed hour.

#### IV

The next day I rose early and started work straight away. The dictation to be copied had not been very long, but I was anxious to do it as neatly and attractively as possible, and that took time. Despite my good intentions I arrived a whole half hour late.

I found Fyodor Mikhailovich in a state of great agitation. "I was starting to think that you had found the work too taxing and would not be returning," he said. "What was more I had omitted to take down your address and risked losing the material I had dictated yesterday."

"I am very ashamed to have arrived so late," I apologised, "but I assure you, that had I even had to decline the work I should as a matter of course have informed you of my decision and sent you a copy of the dictated text."

"The reason why I was so worried," Fyodor Mikhailovich explained, "was that I have to complete the novel by November 1st, and I have not even drawn up a plan for it yet. All I know is that it has to be at least seven signatures of the type Stellovsky prints."

I then asked for more details on that point and Fyodor Mikhailovich explained the truly scandalous trap that had been laid for him.

After the death of his elder brother Mikhail, Fyodor Mikhailovich had taken over responsibility for all the debts incurred in connection with the publication of the journal *Vremya*\* of which his brother had been editor. The debts had been in the form of promissory notes and the creditors left Fyodor Mikhailovich no peace, threatening to have property inventoried and himself thrown into a debtor's prison, a perfectly feasible step in those days.

The really urgent debts totalled about three thousand roubles. Fyodor Mikhailovich had tried all possible ways to raise the money but with no success. After all attempts to stave off the creditors had failed and when Fyodor Mikhailovich was quite desperate, the publisher Stellovsky called on him unexpectedly and offered to buy the rights to publish a three-volume collection of his works for three thousand roubles. Worse still, Fyodor Mikhailovich was to write a new novel to be included in the edition for no additional payment.

Fyodor Mikhailovich's position was critical and he had agreed to all conditions of the contract, that being the only way to avoid incarceration.

The contract had been concluded in (the summer of) 186(5) and Stellovsky delivered the stipulated sum to the notary. The next day the money was paid out to the creditors which meant that Fyodor Mikhailovich received nothing. The hardest blow of all was that a few days later the whole sum was in Stellovsky's hands again. It turned out that he had bought up for a song all Fyodor Mikhailovich's promissory notes and through two stand-ins had been pestering Dostoyevsky for money. Stellovsky was a cunning and adept exploiter of our writers and musicians

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\* These debts incurred in connection with the journal *Epokha* (and not *Vremya*) remained once it had closed down after a year of publication (1864—65) in place of the banned journal *Vremya*. After Mikhail Dostoyevsky's death (in July 1864), his brother Fyodor took over as editor of *Epokha*. As Dostoyevsky informed A.E. Wrangel in a letter of March 31, 1865, these debts totalled 33,000 roubles.—*Ed.*

(Pisemsky, Krestovsky, Glinka). He knew how to catch people in moments of crisis and trap them. The price of three thousand roubles was far too low for the publishing rights that Stellovsky had obtained in view of the success which Dostoyevsky's previous novels had enjoyed. The most stringent of the conditions laid down in the contract was the deadline of November 1, 1866, for the new novel. If Fyodor Mikhailovich failed to deliver the novel in time he would have to pay a large forfeit and if he failed to complete the novel by December 1st he would lose his right to all royalties from his earlier works which would become Stellovsky's property once and for all. This of course was what the predatory publisher was hoping for.

In 1866 Fyodor Mikhailovich was engrossed in work on his novel *Crime and Punishment* and was determined to finish it as befitted a work of literature. How was he now to complete a new work of such length, plagued by ill health into the bargain?

On his return from Moscow in the autumn Fyodor Mikhailovich grew desperate as he realised the impossibility of fulfilling the conditions laid down in his contract with Stellovsky in the course of a mere six to eight weeks. His friends—Maikov, Milyukov and Dolgomostyev among others—anxious to help him in his plight offered to draw up a plan for the new novel. Each of them offered to write a part of the novel and a group of three or four of them would, they believed, succeed in completing the project by the set date. All that would then be left for Fyodor Mikhailovich to do would be to edit the manuscript and smooth out some of the unevenness which would be inevitable in such a piece of writing. Fyodor Mikhailovich rejected the proposal: he decided he would rather pay the forfeit money or lose his rights to his works than put his name to other people's work. Then his friends advised Fyodor Mikhailovich to engage the services of a stenographer. Milyukov remembered that he knew a stenography teacher by the name of Olkhin, called on him and asked him to pay a visit to Fyodor Mikhailovich. Though Dostoyevsky had grave doubts as to the feasibility of such a method, nevertheless since time was running out, he decided to resort to the assistance of a stenographer.

Although I was little versed in the ways of the world at that time, nevertheless Stellovsky's behaviour struck me as quite shameless.

After tea had been served Fyodor Mikhailovich started dictating. He clearly found it difficult to get down to work. He made frequent pauses to ponder over something or ask me to

read back what he had dictated and an hour later he announced that he was tired and needed to rest.

We started talking as on the previous evening. Fyodor Mikhailovich seemed worried and kept flitting from one subject to another. He asked once more what my name was and a moment later had forgotten it again. Twice he offered me a cigarette although I had told him before that I did not smoke.

I started asking him questions about our Russian writers and this took his mind off the thoughts that dogged him. He spoke of them calmly, in an almost light-hearted tone. Some details of that conversation I can still recall.

Fyodor Mikhailovich considered Nekrasov a friend of his youth and held his poetic talent in high regard. Maikov he admired not only as a gifted poet but also as an outstandingly intelligent, good man. Turgenev he referred to as an excellent writer. He regretted, however, that living for so long abroad he was losing touch with Russia and Russians.

After a short break we settled down to work again. Fyodor Mikhailovich soon grew irritable and agitated once more. Work was clearly proving difficult for him. This I put down to the fact that he was not used to dictating to virtual strangers.

Around four o'clock I made ready to leave promising to come back the following day at twelve with the copied text ready. When taking his leave of me Fyodor Mikhailovich handed me a pile of thick writing paper with faintly ruled lines, the kind he usually worked with, and indicated which margins I should leave.

## V

That was how our work began and was to continue. I would come to Dostoyevsky's house every morning at twelve o'clock and stay until four. During that time I would take dictation for three periods of half an hour or more and between whiles we took tea and talked. I was soon happy to note that Fyodor Mikhailovich was becoming accustomed to this new method of work and grew progressively calmer from one visit to the next. He cheered up in particular when after calculating how many of my pages were the equivalent of one of Stellovsky's, I was able to work out how much we had managed to dictate altogether. The growing number of pages encouraged Fyodor Mikhailovich and made him more and more optimistic. He would turn to me and ask: "How many pages did we do yesterday? How many

have we done altogether? What do you think, will we have it finished in time? ”

In his informal conversations with me each day Fyodor Mikhailovich would tell me about yet another of the sad pages of his past. As I listened to his stories of misfortunes which seemed to have dogged him all his life, a growing sense of pity filled my heart.

At first I used to wonder why I never saw any of his family. I did not know of whom his family consisted and where its members were at the time. I had only met one of his family during what I think must have been my fourth visit. My visit over, I was coming out into the street when a young man stopped me: I recognised him as the man whom I had seen in the hall on the first occasion when I came to see Fyodor Mikhailovich. Close to, he seemed even more unattractive than from a distance. He had a sallow, almost yellow complexion, dark eyes with yellow whites and tobacco-stained teeth.

“Don’t you recognise me?” the young man asked casually, “I saw you in Papa’s house. I don’t want to come in when you’re at work, but I am curious to know what stenography is, particularly since I plan to start studying it in a few days’ time. Allow me.” And he proceeded to take my document case out of my hands, opened it and there and then in the street started to look through my shorthand notes. I was so taken aback at his familiar behaviour that I did not even protest.

“Funny stuff,” he proffered by way of a casual comment, as he returned my papers. I was surprised that such a kind, gentle man as Fyodor Mikhailovich should have such an ill-mannered son.

Each day Fyodor Mikhailovich’s manner towards me became increasingly warm and kind. He often used to call me his “little dove” (his favourite term of endearment), or “dear Anna Grigorievna” and “little angel”: all these words I attributed to his fatherly attitude towards me, a young woman little more than a school-girl. I derived untold pleasure from lightening his burden and observing how my assurances that our work was going well and that the novel would be ready in time encouraged Fyodor Mikhailovich and put him in better spirits. I was proud to think that I was not only helping my favourite writer to go about his work but also helping to improve his morale. All this was good for my self-respect.

I soon stopped being afraid of the “famous writer” and opened out as with an uncle or old friend. I used to ask Fyodor Mikhailovich questions about various events in his life and he

was always ready to satisfy my curiosity. He told me all about the eight months he had spent as a prisoner in the Peter and Paul Fortress and how the prisoners had knocked out code messages to each other through their cell walls.\* He also talked about the years he spent in a penal settlement, about the criminals who were serving their time in the same prison. He also used to reminisce about his travels abroad and the people he had encountered; about his Moscow relatives, to whom he was very attached.\*\* On another occasion he told me that he had been married and that his wife had died three years previously. He showed me her portrait\*\*\* which did not make a favourable impression on me. It emerged from his account that his late wife had sat for the portrait when she was already seriously ill, only a year before her death, when she already looked terrible, a walking corpse. Then it was that I learnt, much to my relief, that the ill-mannered young man to whom I had taken such a strong dislike was *not* Fyodor Mikhailovich's son, but his wife's son by her first marriage to Alexander Ivanovich Isaev. Fyodor Mikhailovich often used to lament his debts, lack of money and material straits. Later I myself was to witness the lengths to which lack of money obliged him to resort.\*\*\*\*

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\* After his arrest on April 23, 1849, in connection with the Petrashevsky affair, Dostoyevsky was a prisoner in the Peter and Paul Fortress until December 24, 1849, when he was sent to Siberia.—*Ed.*

\*\*The reference is to the family of his favourite sister, Vera Mikhailovna Ivanova.—*Ed.*

\*\*\*Maria Dmitrievna Isaeva.—*Ed.*

\*\*\*\*On one occasion when I arrived to take dictation, I noticed that one of the beautiful Chinese vases which Dostoyevsky's Siberian friends had given him, had disappeared. When I asked if it had been broken Fyodor Mikhailovich replied: "No, it has not been broken but I have had to pawn it. Yesterday I was in urgent need of twenty-five roubles and so took it to the pawn-shop." Three days later a similar fate befell the second vase.

Another time, as I was walking through the dining-room after work was over, I noticed a wooden spoon next to the plate laid ready for Dostoyevsky's lunch. I remarked with a laugh to Fyodor Mikhailovich who was seeing me to the door that I knew he would be having buckwheat for dinner. "What makes you think that, I wonder?" "The spoon over there, for they say that buckwheat tastes best of all out of a wooden spoon." "You're wrong I'm afraid: I was in need of money and sent the silver ones to the pawnbroker's. They give you a lot less for an incomplete set, so I had to include mine as well." Fyodor Mikhailovich always approached his financial difficulties in a most light-hearted way.—*Auth.*



All Fyodor Mikhailovich's stories were of a sad character, and once I could not help asking: "Fyodor Mikhailovich, why do you always recount your misfortunes? Why don't you tell me about some times when you were happy?"

"Happy? Happiness is something I have not known, at least the kind of happiness I have yearned for. I am still hoping for it. A few days ago I wrote to my friend Baron Wrangel saying that despite the calamities which have befallen me I still hoped to embark on a happy, new life."

How sad that sounded to my ears. Strange to think that with over half his life behind him, this good and talented man had not yet found the happiness he longed for and merely dreamt of doing so.

On another occasion Fyodor Mikhailovich told me how he had paid court to Anna Vassilyevna Korvin-Krukovskaya, telling me how happy he had been when that clever, talented and good-hearted girl had agreed to marry him, and how sad it had made him to relinquish her, realising that their diametrically opposed ideas made conjugal happiness impossible.\*

On one of the days when Fyodor Mikhailovich was in a particularly agitated state he told me that the present moment was a turning point in his life when three roads lay open to him: either he could go to the East, to Constantinople or Jerusalem and stay there for good, or go to Europe to take up roulette and abandon himself completely to that game which had always held out such fascination for him, or, finally, marry for a second time and seek happiness in his work and family life. How to choose between these three paths which would open up a completely new chapter in his life, was a source of constant

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\* The story of Dostoyevsky's love for Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya is told in the book *Childhood Reminiscences* by her sister Sofia Kovalevskaya. However, it does not emerge from those memoirs that Anna Vassilyevna was ever engaged to Dostoyevsky even for a short time, or that Dostoyevsky was obliged to "relinquish her" on account of differences in their convictions. According to Sofia Kovalevskaya, Anna Vassilyevna told her sister immediately after Dostoyevsky's proposal: "He does not need a wife like me. His wife must devote herself completely to him, but completely, dedicate her whole life to him, think of nothing else but him. I cannot do that, I want to live too!" Echoes of the relationship between Dostoyevsky and Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya are to be found in his writings. Some aspects of Anna Vassilyevna's character and moral attitudes can be recognised in Aglaya in *The Idiot*, Akhmakova in *A Raw Youth* and Katerina Ivanovna in *The Brothers Karamazov*.—Ed.

concern to Fyodor Mikhailovich: being well aware of my friendly sympathy he asked me what I should advise in the circumstances.

I must confess that I found it very awkward to answer such a candid question, since his wishes to visit the East\* or become a gambler seemed vague and fantastic to me; knowing some happy families among my friends and relatives, I recommended that Fyodor Mikhailovich should marry again and seek happiness in family life.

"So you think that I could marry again?" asked Fyodor Mikhailovich in an inquiring tone. "That someone would agree to marry me? What kind of wife should I choose: a clever one or a kind one?"

"A clever one of course."

"No, if I had the choice, I should make sure she were kind, that she should take care of me and love me."

While on the subject of his own marriage Fyodor Mikhailovich asked me whether I was planning to marry. I replied that two men had asked for my hand and they were both fine men whom I respected but felt no love for, and I wanted to marry for love.

"Only for love," Fyodor Mikhailovich echoed fervently, "respect alone is not enough for a happy marriage!"

## VI

Some time later, in the middle of October, while we were at work, the poet Maikov appeared unexpectedly one day in the doorway of the study. I had seen pictures of him before and recognised him at a glance.

"A real open house you have here, to be sure," he remarked to Fyodor Mikhailovich, "the door onto the landing wide open and not a servant in sight. Anyone could walk off with the whole establishment!"

Fyodor Mikhailovich was obviously pleased to see Maikov. He at once introduced us, referring to me as his "zealous

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\* Fyodor Mikhailovich seriously entertained the idea of going to the East as is borne out by the letter of recommendation to A.S. Engelhardt, member of the Imperial Russian Mission in Constantinople, later found among his papers. It had been given him by E. P. Kovalevskaya, then Chairman of the Literary Fund. The letter was dated June 3, 186(3).—*Auth.*

collaborator" which description I found most flattering. Apollon Nikolayevich, on hearing my name, asked if I happened to be a relative of the recently deceased writer by the name of Snitkin (the usual question when I was introduced to writers) and then made as if to leave, saying he was afraid he was holding us back from our work. I suggested we had a break, whereupon Fyodor Mikhailovich took Maikov into the next room. They talked together for some twenty minutes while I settled down to copy out the dictation I had just taken down.

Maikov came back into the study to say good-bye to me and asked Fyodor Mikhailovich to dictate something in his presence. At that time stenography was an innovation and something everyone found intriguing. Fyodor Mikhailovich obliged and dictated half a page of his novel. Then I read back what he had dictated. Maikov scrutinised my notes exclaiming: "Well, I cannot make head or tail of this!"

Maikov made a very favourable impression on me. I had enjoyed his poetry before, and Fyodor Mikhailovich's praise of him as an admirable man served to add weight to this positive impression.

As time went by Fyodor Mikhailovich became more and more engrossed in work on the new novel. He no longer dictated straight off but instead would work during the night and then dictate to me from his own manuscript version. Sometimes he managed to write so much that I would be sitting up long past midnight copying out what I had taken in dictation earlier in the day. Yet what a sense of triumph I felt the next day as I announced the number of pages that we could add to the total! How pleasant it was to watch Fyodor Mikhailovich's face light up with a happy smile as I assured him that work was going well and there was definitely no doubt that we would have the novel ready by Stellovsky's deadline.

Both of us had become involved with the characters of the novel; both I and Fyodor Mikhailovich had favourite characters and disapproved of others. My sympathies went out to the old granny who gambled away all her fortune and Mr. Astley, while I despised Paulina and the hero himself, whom I could not forgive his weakness and passion for gambling. Fyodor Mikhailovich, on the other hand, was completely on the side of the "gambler" and said that he had himself experienced many of the hero's feelings and impressions.\* He assured me that it was

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\* The novel *The Gambler* is in many respects autobiographical: much of the material is based on Dostoyevsky's own passion for roulette, which had a hold on him for a long time during his foreign travels in 1862-63 and 1865, and on his relationship with Apollinaria Suslova.—Ed.

possible to possess a strong character, demonstrate this through one's various actions and yet be powerless to master a passion for roulette.

Sometimes I marvelled at my own boldness in expressing my ideas in relation to the novel and still more at the attentive way in which the talented writer listened to my rather childish comments and conclusions. Within the first three weeks of our work together all my former interests had stopped going to background. With Olkhin's permission I had stopped going to my stenography lectures, saw few of my friends, and found myself concentrating more and more on our work and the highly interesting conversations which took place between dictation sessions. I found myself comparing Fyodor Mikhailovich with the young men whom I had met in my circle of friends. How empty and trivial their conversation seemed to me after all the new and original ideas I had been hearing from my favourite writer.

After leaving his house full of the new ideas I had been confronted with, I would feel bored at home and be looking forward to my meeting with Fyodor Mikhailovich on the following day. I grew sad as I saw that the work was coming to an end and our acquaintance would soon be a thing of the past. What a happy surprise it was when Fyodor Mikhailovich expressed his regret in the same connection. "You know, Anna Grigorievna\* what I've been thinking? You and I have been getting along so well and have had such friendly meetings every day and our lively conversations have become such a habit that I cannot imagine that all this should come to an end once the novel is completed, can you? Wouldn't it be a pity? I shall miss you a great deal. Where shall I see you after that?"

"But Fyodor Mikhailovich," I answered somewhat at a loss for words, "there is no reason why we should not come across each other now and again."

"But where, for instance?"

"At some friend's house, at the theatre or at a concert...."

"You know I go out very little and visit the theatre rarely. Yes, and what kind of meetings are those when we hardly have the chance to say so much as a word to each other? Why don't you invite me to your home, to meet your family?"

"Please come and see us, it would make us very happy. Only

\* It was about a whole month before Fyodor Mikhailovich remembered my name which hitherto he kept forgetting and asking me to repeat to him.—*Auth.*

"I'm afraid that my mother and I shall not seem very interesting company for you."

"When can I come? "

"That we can arrange after the work's completed," I said, "but now the most important thing is to finish your novel."

The fateful day, November 1st, was approaching when the novel had to be delivered to Stellovsky, and Fyodor Mikhailovich was now haunted by the fear that the publisher might take resort to some ruse so as to obtain the forfeit money after all, refusing, under some pretext or other, to accept or acknowledge delivery of the manuscript. I reassured Fyodor Mikhailovich as best I could and promised to find out what he ought to do if his suspicions proved true. That very evening I persuaded my mother to go and seek advice from a lawyer we knew. His advice was to hand over the manuscript either to a notary or the police-officer for the district where Stellovsky resided but in either case to get a receipt for it signed officially. The same advice was given by Justice of the Peace Freiman (the brother of one of Fyodor Mikhailovich's former schoolfellows) whom he also consulted.

## VII

On October 29th our last dictation session took place. *The Gambler* was completed. From October 4th to October 29th, namely in the course of twenty-six days, Fyodor Mikhailovich had written a novel that would fill seven signatures of two-column pages, in other words the equivalent of ten ordinary signatures. Fyodor Mikhailovich was elated and announced to me that, provided he handed the manuscript over to Stellovsky without mishap, he would give a celebration dinner at a restaurant for his friends (Maikov, Milyukov and others) and invited me to the banquet in advance.

"Have you ever been to a restaurant, by the way?" he asked.

"No, never."

"But you will come to my dinner, won't you? I am anxious to drink the health of my dear collaborator! Without your help I should never have completed the novel in time. So you will come, won't you?"

I replied that I should consult my mother first but to myself I decided not to go. I knew my shyness would make me feel out of place and spoil the general merriment.

The next day, October 30th I brought Fyodor Mikhailovich my copy of the passage dictated the day before. He greeted me in a particularly friendly way and even flushed slightly when I came in. As was our wont, we counted the pages I had brought and were happy to note that there was a large number, even more than we had expected. Fyodor Mikhailovich told me that he would now settle down straight away to reading through the novel, making the odd correction here and there, and that the next day he would take it round to Stellovsky. He then handed me the fifty roubles we had agreed on, gave my hand a firm shake and thanked me most heartily for my collaboration.

I knew that October 30th was Fyodor Mikhailovich's birthday and had decided to wear a mauve silk dress instead of my usual black one of plain cloth. Fyodor Mikhailovich, who had always seen me in mourning before, was flattered at this attention and commented that mauve suited me admirably and I looked taller and more elegant in a long dress. I was happy to hear this praise, but my good mood was spoilt by the arrival of Emilia Fyodorovna, widow of Fyodor Mikhailovich's brother, who came round to convey her birthday greetings. Fyodor Mikhailovich introduced us and explained to his sister-in-law that thanks to my help he had been able to complete his novel on the appointed day and thus avoid the disaster that had been threatening him. Despite this explanation Emilia Fyodorovna treated me in a cold arrogant manner, which first astonished and then offended me. Her disagreeable tone was not to Fyodor Mikhailovich's liking either and he, for his part, went out of his way to talk to me in a particularly kind and friendly manner. Suggesting that I should have a look at a book which had only just come out, he took Emilia Fyodorovna over to one side and started to show her some papers.

Then Apollon Maikov arrived. He greeted me but clearly did not recognise me. On turning to Fyodor Mikhailovich he asked how the novel was getting on. Fyodor Mikhailovich who was engrossed in conversation with his sister-in-law must have missed the question for he made no reply. Then I decided to answer for him and said that the novel had been completed the day before and that I had just brought back the manuscript copy of the last chapter. Maikov strode over to me, stretched out his hand and apologised for not recognising me at once. He put this omission down to his shortsightedness and also said that I had looked different in my black dress.

He asked me many questions about the novel and inquired as to my opinion of it. I had the highest praise for this new

work, which had become so dear to me. I said that it contained some unusually lively and well-drawn characters such as the grandmother, Mr. Astley and the infatuated general. We talked together for some twenty minutes and I found myself perfectly at ease with that charming, kind man. Emilia Fyodorovna was surprised at the attention Maikov was showing me, even shocked, I should say, yet her own tone remained cold and she obviously considered it beneath her to spend kind attention on a mere stenographer.

Maikov soon left and I followed suit having no desire to suffer Emilia Fyodorovna's arrogant condescension towards me any longer. Fyodor Mikhailovich begged me to stay and did all he could to make up for the tactless behaviour of his sister-in-law. He saw me to the door and reminded me that I had promised to invite him to our home. I assured him that the invitation was still open.

"But when can I come? Tomorrow?"

"No, tomorrow I shall not be at home: I have been invited to the house of a school friend."

"And the next day?"

"The day after tomorrow I have a stenography lecture."

"Then it will have to be November 2nd?"

"On Wednesday, November 2nd, I am going to the theatre."

"Good heavens! How booked up you are this week! You know, Anna Grigorievna, I am beginning to suspect that you're saying all that on purpose. You just don't want me to come. Be honest with me now!"

"Oh no, I assure you! We should be very happy for you to be our guest. Please come on November 3rd, that's Thursday, at seven o'clock in the evening."

"Not before Thursday! What a long time! I shall miss you very much!"

I, of course, looked upon those words as no more than a courtesy.

## VIII

So those blissful days were over and life became unbelievably dull. I had grown so used to hurrying along to my dictation sessions with a light heart, looking forward to my meetings with Fyodor Mikhailovich and our animated conversations together, that now they were interrupted I did not know what to do with myself. All my previous occupations ceased to

hold out any interest for me and now seemed empty and futile. Even Fyodor Mikhailovich's promised visit, instead of being something to look forward to, filled me with apprehension. I realised that neither my dear Mamma nor I could be interesting companions for such a clever and talented man. I put our animated conversations down to the fact that they had been centred round the work in which we were involved together. Now, however, Fyodor Mikhailovich was coming to our house as a guest, who would require to be entertained. I tried to think up subjects for the forth-coming conversation and tormented myself with the thought that the tiring journey to our suburb and the tedious evening he would spend with us would, for such a highly impressionable person as Fyodor Mikhailovich, blot out all recollections of our earlier meetings and that he would regret ever having bothered to make such an uninteresting acquaintance. While longing to see Fyodor Mikhailovich again, I almost hoped that he would forget about his promise to visit us.

Being optimistic by nature I tried to occupy my time and banish my sad, or rather anxious mood: I visited a former school-friend and on the following evening I went to a stenography lecture. Olkhin greeted me with congratulations on our successfully completed project. Fyodor Mikhailovich had written to him about it and thanked him for recommending me, saying that without my help he would not have been able to complete that novel by the necessary date. Fyodor Mikhailovich had also added that he had found this method of writing most convenient and intended to have recourse to it in the future as well.

On Thursday, November 3rd I began preparing for Fyodor Mikhailovich's visit first thing in the morning. I went out to buy the pears I knew he liked and various confections of the kind he had offered me on occasions. I felt agitated the whole day and by seven o'clock I had worked myself up into a terrible state. But half-past seven struck and then eight o'clock with still no sign of him. I decided that he had either changed his mind about coming or forgotten his promise. At half-past eight the long-awaited ring at the door-bell came at last. I hurried out to meet Fyodor Mikhailovich and asked: "How *did* you manage to find me, Fyodor Mikhailovich?"

"I like that!" he answered in a friendly voice, "it sounds as though you are sorry I have found you. Yet I have been looking for you since seven o'clock, driving round the whole of this neighbourhood and asking every passer-by the way. Everyone



knows that there is a Kostromskaya Street here but how to find it, that's quite a different matter.\* Fortunately we at last met a kind soul who took a seat next to the cab-driver and showed him which way to go."

At that point my mother came in and I made haste to introduce her to Fyodor Mikhailovich. He kissed her hand in a gallant manner and said how indebted he was to me for my help and how much anxiety the delivery of the manuscript to Stellovsky had caused him. Just as we had foreseen, Stellovsky had tried another of his cunning tricks: he had left for the provinces that day, and his servant had announced that he did not know when his master would be back. Fyodor Mikhailovich had then gone to Stellovsky's office and tried to hand over the manuscript to the man in charge who refused to accept it, saying he had not been authorised to do so by his employer. Fyodor Mikhailovich arrived too late at the notary's office to hand it in there, and at the local police station none of the officials were to be found when he called and he was asked to call again in the evening. The whole of that day Fyodor Mikhailovich had spent in a state of acute anxiety, and it was not until ten o'clock in the evening that he was finally able to hand over the manuscript at the police station in the N district in exchange for a receipt from the constable in charge.

We then sat down to drink tea and conversation was as gay and uninhibited as ever. The subjects for conversation which I had mentally prepared had to be put on one side, so many new and fascinating ones sprang up. Fyodor Mikhailovich quite won my mother's heart, although initially she had been rather overawed at the prospect of the "famous" writer visiting us. Fyodor Mikhailovich knew how to win people over, and later I was often to observe how people, even those who were at first biased against him, succumbed to his charm.

Among other things Fyodor Mikhailovich told me that he wanted to make a week's break and then to resume work on the last part of *Crime and Punishment*. "I make free to ask for your help, my kind Anna Grigorievna. I found working with you so easy and am anxious to go on dictating my work to you in the future as well. I hope you won't decline to go on being my collaborator."

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\* Kostromskaya Street is behind the Nikolayevsky Military Hospital and the most direct way to it is through the hospital compound. In the evening the gates were shut and it was only possible to reach our street from Slonovaya Street (now Suvorov Prospect) or from Malaya Bolotnaya.—*Auth.*

"I should be very happy to help," I replied, "but I don't know how Olkhin will view the matter. Perhaps he intends this new work for another of his pupils."

"But I am used to your way of working now and am highly satisfied with it. It would be strange were Olkhin to take it into his head to recommend another stenographer whom I might not find so congenial. Can it be that you yourself do not wish to continue with the work? If that is the case, I shall of course not insist."

He was clearly disappointed. I tried to reassure him saying, that in all probability Olkhin would have nothing against me taking on the new work, yet I ought to ask him about it first.

At about eleven o'clock Fyodor Mikhailovich made ready to go, and, as he took his leave, he made me promise I would bring up the matter with Olkhin at the next lecture and then write to him as to the outcome. We parted on a most friendly note and I went back into the dining room thrilled at how lively our conversation had been. Ten minutes later, however, the maid came in to say that someone had stolen the cushion from the sleigh of the cab-driver who had brought Fyodor Mikhailovich to our house. The cab-driver was beside himself and had only calmed down when Fyodor Mikhailovich promised to make good his loss.

I was still so young then that this episode had a most depressing effect on me: I imagined that an incident of that sort might influence Fyodor Mikhailovich's attitude towards us and that he would never come to our remote suburb after that, thinking that he might be robbed there just as his cab-driver had been. I found it truly heart-breaking that such a wonderful evening should be spoilt by such a galling mishap.

## IX

The day after Fyodor Mikhailovich's visit I set off to spend the whole day with my sister Maria Svatkovskaya and told her and her husband Pavel Grigorievich about my work for Dostoyevsky. Since I had been spending my days working for Fyodor Mikhailovich and my evenings copying out the shorthand reports ever since early October, I had only managed to see my sister in brief snatches and by this time I had plenty to tell her. My sister listened attentively to all I had to say, interrupting the while to ask all sorts of questions. After seeing how excited I was she said, as I was leaving: "It's no good you're getting so enraptured with Dostoyevsky, Netochka. Your

dreams can never come true, and thank Heavens, if as you say he is so ill and with so many debts and relatives on his hands.'

I retorted that I was not "enraptured" with Dostoyevsky in the slightest, had no "dreams" of any such kind, but merely enjoyed talking to a clever and talented man and was grateful to him for his unchanging kindness and consideration towards me.

Yet these words of my sister's had taken me aback and on returning home I started asking myself: perhaps my sister Maria was right after all and I really was "enraptured"? Could this be the first stirrings of love, which I had not hitherto experienced? What a ridiculous dream that would have been on my part! Was such a thing possible? But if this was the beginning of love, what should I do? Ought I not to decline his offer of further work resorting to some convincing excuse, stop seeing him and thinking about him, try gradually to forget Dostoyevsky and find some new absorbing occupation so as to restore my previous peace of mind, by which I had always set so much store? Yet it was also possible that Maria was wrong and that this acquaintance held out no danger for my heart. Why in that case should I deprive myself of the stenographer's work which I had been looking forward to so much and the interesting informal conversation that accompanied the work?

What was more, I should have felt very sorry to abandon Fyodor Mikhailovich without the services of a stenographer now that he had adapted himself to this method of work, particularly since I knew of no one else among Olkhin's pupils (apart from two who had already found permanent employment) who could adequately replace me both as far as speed and prompt delivery of manuscript copies were concerned.

All these thoughts left me no peace and I started to worry a great deal about what path of action I should take.

The next Sunday, November 6th, I was to go to pay my respects to my godmother on her birthday. I was not on close terms with her and only used to visit her on high days and holidays. There would be a large number of guests at her house and I was relying on this gathering to disperse the disturbing thoughts that had been weighing on me for the last few days. She lived a long way from our house near Alarchin Bridge, and made ready to leave before nightfall. After we had sent for a cab I sat down to play the piano and the noise of the music prevented me from hearing the door-bell ring. Suddenly I heard a man's footsteps, looked round and to my great surprise and joy saw Fyodor Mikhailovich come in. His face wore a timid and somewhat embarrassed expression. I rose to meet him.

"Well, Anna Grigorievna, you see what I've done," said Fyodor Mikhailovich as he gave my hand a firm shake. "These last few days I have missed you a great deal, and this morning I found myself wondering whether it would be proper for me to visit you. Might not you and your mother find such a quick return rather strange: I was at your house on Thursday and appear again on Sunday! I decided I should definitely not go and, as you see, here I am after all!"

"What makes you think such things, Fyodor Mikhailovich!? Mamma and I shall always be glad to welcome you here!"

Despite my assurances, our conversation flagged, I could not keep my anxiety under control and only answered the questions which Fyodor Mikhailovich put to me, while coming forward with none myself. There was another factor, which had nothing to do with me but which also made me restless. The large hall in which we were sitting had not yet been properly heated and it was very cold. Fyodor Mikhailovich also noticed this.

"I must say it is cold here; and so are you—Oh! so cold today!" Then noticing I was wearing pale grey silk dress he asked whether I was going out and where to.

On learning that I had to leave shortly to visit my godmother Fyodor Mikhailovich declared that he would not wish to delay me and suggested that he should take me there in his cab. I agreed and we set off. As the cab turned a sharp bend Fyodor Mikhailovich made to put his arm round my waist to hold me steady. I, like any other young girl of the sixties, disdained such marks of attention as kissing hands, putting arms round waists etc., and so I told him: "Please don't worry—I shan't fall out!"

Fyodor Mikhailovich must have taken offence for he said: "How I wish you would fall out of the sleigh this very minute!"

I burst out laughing, and our peace was made. The rest of the way we chatted merrily and my sad mood vanished into thin air as it were. When he said good-bye Fyodor Mikhailovich gave me a firm handshake and made me promise that I would come to his house in two days' time to make arrangements in connection with our work on *Crime and Punishment*.

## X

November 8, 1866 is one of the most memorable days of my life. It was on that day that Fyodor Mikhailovich told me he

loved me and asked me to be his wife. Fifty years have passed since that day and yet all the details of that dear day are as clear in my memory as if it had been no more than a month ago.

It was a bright, frosty day, and I set off to see Fyodor Mikhailovich on foot, which was why I arrived half an hour later than the appointed time. Fyodor Mikhailovich had obviously been waiting: on hearing my voice in the hall he came out at once.

"At last you've come!" he said happily and started to help me undo my hood and take off my coat. We then went into his study together. On that day the room was very bright, and I noticed that Fyodor Mikhailovich was very excited about something. His face had a very animated, almost ecstatic look about it, which made him seem much younger than usual.

"How glad I am that you've come," Fyodor Mikhailovich began. "I was so worried that you would forget about your promise."

"But why should you have thought that? When I give my word I always keep it."

"Forgive me, I know that you are always true to your word. I'm so happy to see you again!"

"I'm happy to see you too, Fyodor Mikhailovich, especially in such high spirits. Have you had a welcome surprise perhaps?"

"Yes I have. Last night I had a wonderful dream!"

"So that's all it was!" I exclaimed with a laugh.

"Don't laugh, please. To me dreams are very important. My dreams are always most significant. When I dream about my dead brother Misha, and especially when I dream about my father I know that some disaster is about to befall me."

"Tell me about your dream!"

"You see that big rosewood box over there? It was a present from my Siberian friend Chokan Valikhanov\* and it means a great deal to me. I keep my manuscripts in it along with letters and objects that have sentimental value for me. Well, in this dream I was sitting in front of that box and sorting out some papers. Suddenly I caught sight of something shiny amongst them, something like a bright star. I started looking among the papers, and the little star kept eluding me. This had me intrigued: I started to sort out the pieces of paper slowly

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\* Chokan Valikhanov, a Kazakh by nationality, was an educator, ethnographer and traveller. Dostoyevsky made his acquaintance in 1854, while in Omsk. Later they became firm friends.—*Ed.*

and between some of the sheets came across a diamond that was tiny but very bright and sparkly."

"What did you do with it?"

"That's just the trouble; I can't remember! Other dreams followed, and I don't know what happened to it. But it was a wonderful dream!"

"People usually say that dreams mean their opposite," I remarked and immediately regretted my words. Fyodor Mikhailovich's face underwent a sudden change and came over all dark.

"So you think that nothing lucky is going to come my way? That it was only a vain hope?" he queried in a sad voice.

"I cannot interpret dreams, and actually I do not believe in them at all," I replied.

I was very sorry to see that Fyodor Mikhailovich's lively mood had vanished, and tried to cheer him up. When he asked what dreams I used to have, I replied in a light vein: "More often than not I see my former headmistress, an imposing figure of a woman with old-fashioned ringlets on her temples, and she is always finding fault with me for something. I also dream about our ginger cat which once jumped on me from off our garden fence frightening the life out of me."

"Oh, what a child you are! A real child!" repeated Fyodor Mikhailovich laughing and casting a gentle look in my direction: "What dreams you have, to be sure! Well, did you spend a pleasant evening at your godmother's birthday party?" he went on.

"It was very gay. After dinner the older generation sat down to play cards and the young people went into the study and spent the evening in lively conversation. There were two very charming, lively students there."

Once more Fyodor Mikhailovich's brow clouded. I was struck by the speed with which his moods were changing. Being unacquainted with the symptoms of epilepsy I wondered whether this rapid succession of moods meant that a fit was at hand, and this thought made me feel most uncomfortable....

It had become a tradition with us that when I came to take dictation from Fyodor Mikhailovich he would tell me about what he had been doing and how he had been spending his time since our last meeting. I made haste to ask Fyodor Mikhailovich what he had been working on the last few days.

"I have thought up a plan for a new novel," he replied.

"Really? An interesting one?"

"I think so, but I can't get the ending right somehow. A young girl's reactions come into it. If I had been in Moscow I

should have turned to my niece Sonya\* but here I have to turn to you for advice."

With pride I made ready to "advise" a talented writer.

"Who is the hero of the novel?"

"An artist no longer in his first youth, about my age."

"Please tell me all about it, do," I said already most interested in the new novel.

In reply to my request there followed a brilliant piece of improvisation. Never before or indeed after was I to hear such an inspired piece of narration from Fyodor Mikhailovich as on that occasion. The further he went the more I realised that Fyodor Mikhailovich was recounting his own life, merely changing the characters and circumstances. Here was everything that he had told me earlier in snatches. The detailed chronological account I heard that day made many things clear to me about his relationship with his former wife and his relatives.

In the new novel there was a difficult childhood, the early loss of an adored father, some fateful events (a serious illness among them) which were to wrest the artist away from his beloved vocation and indeed life itself for ten whole years. There followed a return to life (the artist's recovery) and a meeting with a woman with whom he fell in love: the torments which that love involved, the death of his wife and loved ones (a favourite sister), poverty, debts....

The hero's mental state, his loneliness, disappointment in friends and family, his yearning for a new life and the need to love, his passionate longing to find new happiness were described so vividly and with such talent that they could not have been merely the fruit of artistic imagination. It was obvious that the author himself must have experienced them.

When describing his hero Fyodor Mikhailovich did not spare sombre tints. In his account the hero was older than his years, suffering from an incurable illness (a paralysed arm) and had a gloomy and suspicious disposition. He did, on the other hand, have a tender heart but was hard put to it to express his emotions. As an artist he was talented but unlucky. Never once did he succeed actually in capturing on canvas his ideas as he saw them in his dreams, and this caused him great anguish.

Realising that the hero of the novel was none other than

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\* Sofia Ivanova, Dostoyevsky's niece, daughter of his sister Vera Mikhailovna. Dostoyevsky was extremely attached to her, set great store by her sparkling intellect and pure heart and wrote to her giving intimate details of his literary projects and private life.—Ed.

Fyodor Mikhailovich I could not help interrupting his account to ask: "But why, Fyodor Mikhailovich, are you so hard on your hero?"

"I can see that he is not to your liking."

"On the contrary, very much so. He has a wonderful heart. Just think how many misfortunes have befallen him and how bravely he has borne them! Most other men, if they were to experience so much suffering in their life, would probably have grown bitter, yet your hero still loves his fellow-men and seeks to help them. No, you are definitely being unjust to him."

"Yes I agree, he really has a kind heart. How glad I am that you have understood. Well, to continue," Fyodor Mikhailovich went on, "at this decisive period in the artist's life his path is crossed by a young girl of your age or perhaps a few years older. Let's give her the name Anna so as not to have to refer to her as the heroine. That's a name I like...."

These words made me more convinced than ever that he must be referring to his former fiancée Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya. At that moment it quite slipped my mind that my own name was Anna too, since it never entered my head that the story might have anything to do with me. The subject for the new novel (I thought to myself) must have taken shape under the impact of the letter which Dostoyevsky had received from Anna not long before, and which Fyodor Mikhailovich had been telling me about.\*

The heroine was drawn in tones quite different from those in which he had presented the hero. According to the author, Anna was gentle, intelligent, kind, cheerful and possessed of great tact in her dealings with other people. In those days I used to attribute great importance to women's external appearance and I couldn't help but ask: "Is your heroine beautiful?"

"She's not a beauty, I must confess, but quite attractive. I love her face."

I felt that Fyodor Mikhailovich had betrayed himself and my heart went cold. A wave of animosity towards Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya came over me and I remarked: "But surely, Fyodor Mikhailovich, you are idealising your Anna too much. Is she really as you paint her?"

"But exactly! I have studied her so carefully. The artist

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\* The letter from Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya had been sent at the very beginning of November 1860. In it she told the writer of her personal problems, informed him of her literary projects and assured Dostoyevsky of her friendly feelings for him.—*Ed.*



used to meet her at art classes," said Fyodor Mikhailovich. "The more he saw of Anna the more she meant to him and the more convinced he became that he could find happiness with her. However, this dream seemed to him to be almost beyond reach. Indeed what could he, an ageing, ill man up to his eyes in debt, offer to a healthy young girl, full of *joie de vivre*? Wouldn't loving the artist mean a terrible sacrifice for the young girl and wouldn't she later regret bitterly that she had linked her life to his? Indeed, is it even feasible that a mere girl could love my artist, being so much younger than he and having such a very different character? Would I not be guilty of psychological inaccuracy here? In fact, this was where I wanted to know your opinion, Anna Grigorievna."

"Why should that be inaccurate? If, as you say, your Anna is no frivolous coquette but has a good, responsive heart, why should she not love your artist? What does it matter that he be ill or poor? Surely love does not depend on externals and riches alone? Where does the sacrifice come in? If she loves him, then she will be happy in her turn and she will never have cause for regrets! "

I spoke those words with feeling. Fyodor Mikhailovich was watching me with rapt attention: "Do you really think that she could love him sincerely for the rest of her life? "

He paused for a moment after that question as if hesitating to go on. "Put yourself in her place for a moment," he said in a voice that shook with emotion. "Imagine that the artist is I and that I have declared my love for you and asked you to be my wife. Tell me, what answer would you have given me? "

Fyodor Mikhailovich's face expressed such tortured suspense that at last it dawned upon me that we had embarked on far more than a literary discussion and that I would be dealing a terrible blow to his pride if my answer were evasive. I looked into that face that was so dear to me and answered: "I should answer that I love you and shall do so for the rest of my life!

I shall not repeat the tender loving words which Fyodor Mikhailovich addressed to me in the unforgettable moment that followed: they are something quite sacred for me....

I was dazed, almost overwhelmed by my boundless happiness and for a long time could not believe it. I remember that when, about an hour later, Fyodor Mikhailovich started talking to me about his plans for our future and asked me what I thought about them I replied: "How could I possibly discuss anything now? I'm so terribly happy!!"

Since we did not know how things would shape and when our marriage could take place, we decided for the time being not to mention our plans to anyone, with the exception of my mother. Fyodor Mikhailovich promised to come round to our house the next day to spend the whole evening with us and said that he would be waiting impatiently for that meeting.

He went with me out into the hall and carefully helped me tie up my hood. I was about to leave when Fyodor Mikhailovich stopped me with the words: "Anna Grigorievna, now I know what happened to the little diamond."

"Do you mean to say you have remembered the end of the dream?"

"No, I have not remembered the dream. But I have found the little diamond at last and am determined to keep it for the rest of my life."

"You're mistaken, Fyodor Mikhailovich," I exclaimed with a laugh, "it is not a little diamond that you have found but a simple pebble."

"No, I am quite sure that I am not mistaken this time," Fyodor Mikhailovich remonstrated in a perfectly serious voice as he showed me to the door.

## XI

When we were talking together one evening Fyodor Mikhailovich asked me: "Tell me, Anya, do you remember the day when you first realised that you loved me?"

"You know, my dear," I replied, "the name Dostoyevsky had been familiar to me since childhood: I have been in love with you or one of your heroes since the age of fifteen."

Fyodor Mikhailovich laughed, taking my words for a joke.

"But seriously, I mean that," I went on. "My father was very fond of reading, and when even the subject of contemporary literature came up, he would always say: 'What kind of writers have we got nowadays? In my time there was Pushkin, Gogol, Zhukovsky! When it came to the younger generation there was Dostoyevsky and his *Poor Folk*. There was really talented writing for you! What a shame that he should have been caught up in that political business, ended up in Siberia and disappeared without trace!'

"And then how thrilled he was when he learnt that the Dostoyevsky brothers were planning to bring out a new journal *Vremya*. 'So Dostoyevsky's back after all,' he announced happily: 'Thank goodness that he survived.'

"Then there was the summer of 1861 that we spent in Peterhof. Every time Mamma went into town to shop, my sister and I begged her to go to the Cherkesov's library for the latest issue of *Vremya*. Our family was definitely founded on the patriarchal pattern, which meant that the new journal would first of all be at Papa's disposal. The poor man, even in those days, was in poor health and often dropped off to sleep in his armchair after dinner over the book or newspaper that he was reading. I used to creep up to him, carefully lift the journal off his knees and then run off into the garden and install myself somewhere under the bushes to enjoy reading your novel undisturbed. But, alas, my intrigues never succeeded! My sister Maria would come along and, insisting on her rights as elder sister, take away the journal despite my pleas to be allowed to finish the latest chapter of *The Insulted and the Injured*.

"I was a regular dreamer in those days," I went on, "and the heroes in novels were real people to me. I hated Prince Valkovsky, despised Alexei for his weak will, felt sorry for old Ikhmenev and pitied unfortunate Nelly with all my heart and ... disliked Natasha.... You see, even the surnames of your characters imprinted themselves on my memory!"

"I cannot remember them and only have a vague idea of the novel's content," remarked Fyodor Mikhailovich.

"Surely you haven't!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "What a shame! I really fell for Ivan Petrovich the narrator. I simply could not understand how Natasha could prefer the nonentity Alexei to that kind man. 'She deserves her suffering,' I thought as I read the work, 'for rejecting Ivan Petrovich's love.' Strange, but for some reason I identified Ivan Petrovich whom I liked so much with the author of the novel. I felt that it was Dostoyevsky himself recounting the sad story of an unrequited love.... If you have forgotten all about it, you must reread that fine novel!"

Fyodor Mikhailovich's interest had been aroused by my account and he promised to reread *The Insulted and the Injured* when he had some free time.

"Incidentally," I went on, "do you remember how once, quite soon after we met, you asked me if I had ever been in love. I replied that I had never been in love with a real person, but that at the age of fifteen I had been in love with a character in a novel. You asked me which novel, but I merely hurried to change the subject for I felt awkward about naming the hero of your novel. You might have thought that was just a desire to please on the part of a young woman anxious to find work in the literary world, while I wished to remain quite independent.

"Then to think of all the tears I shed over *Notes From the House of the Dead*. It filled my heart with sympathy and pity for Dostoyevsky who had endured those terrible years out in Siberia. It was with the same feeling that I came to work for you. I was anxious to help you, in some way to make easier the life of a man whose works I held in such deep admiration. I praised God for making Olkhin choose me and no one else to come and work for you."

Noticing that my reference to *Notes from the House of the Dead* had put Fyodor Mikhailovich in a sad mood I hastened to give the conversation a more light-hearted turn, remarking: "You know I think Fate herself must have picked me out as a wife for you: ever since the age of sixteen I have been nicknamed Netochka Nezvanova. Netochka came naturally as a pet-name for Anna, and since I often used to pay surprise visits on my relatives, they nicknamed me Netochka Nezvanova\* thus hinting at my partiality for Dostoyevsky's novels. So you may call me Netochka too," I suggested to Fyodor Mikhailovich.

"No!" he replied. "My Netochka endured too much hardship and sorrow in her life, and I want you always to be happy. I'd better call you Anya, the name I've grown fond of!"

The next evening I, in my turn, brought up a question which had interested me for some time but which I had felt shy about asking. I wanted to know when he had first felt that he loved me and when he had decided to propose to me.

Fyodor Mikhailovich started to think back and then, to my great disappointment, he confessed that during the first week of our acquaintance he had not even noticed what my face looked like.

"Not noticed? What do you mean?" I asked in astonishment.

"If you are introduced to someone for the first time and exchange a few everyday courtesies with him, do you really take note of his face? Surely not? I, at any rate, always forget what they look like. It was the same with you: I would talk to you, look at your face but once you had left I would forget what you looked like almost immediately and should not have been able to answer whether you were a blonde or a brunette if someone had asked me. It was only at the end of October that I noticed your pretty grey eyes and kind bright smile. Yes, and then I took a liking to everything about your face and the more I saw of you the stronger that feeling grew. Now there is

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\* i.e., the uninvited.—Ed.

nothing in the whole world that is as dear to me as your face! For me you are a true beauty! And not just for me!" added Fyodor Mikhailovich carried away by his almost childlike enthusiasm.

"During your first visit," he recalled, "I was struck by the tactful way you behaved, your serious, almost forbidding exterior. I thought to myself: what an attractive type of serious, efficient girl! I was happy to note that such a type could appear in our society. At one turn in the conversation I used an ill-chosen word by mistake and you gave me such a look, that after that I started weighing my turns of phrase more carefully so as not to offend you. Later I was surprised and attracted by the sincere interest you were taking in my affairs and the sympathy you showed me in face of the threat that hung over me. I used to think to myself: my family, my friends seem to be fond enough of me; they lament the fact that I might have to surrender my rights to my literary works, show indignation at Stellovsky's behaviour and reproach me for signing a contract like that (as if I had had any alternative open to me!), give me advice and proffer comfort, yet I felt that all that was 'words, words, words' and that none of them took the impending loss of my very last possessions really to heart. Then a stranger, a girl I hardly knew showed such understanding for my position and without any fuss or bother, or cries of indignation just settled down to help me with deeds instead of words. When our work was properly under way a few days later, I felt a flicker of hope kindle within my despairing heart. I thought that if our work continued at the same pace there was a hope that we might be finished in time. Your assurances that we were bound to succeed (remember how we used to count the pages you brought back each morning) fanned that hope and gave me strength to carry on. Often, as I was talking to you I thought to myself what a kind heart you had. Her pity is not just a question of words but real, and she is doing her best to rescue me from disaster. I felt so isolated then that to find someone who was sincerely sympathetic was a great comfort.

"That I think was when my love for you was born," Fyodor Mikhailovich went on, "and afterwards I grew attached to your dear face as well. I kept catching myself thinking about you, but it was only after we had finished *The Gambler* and I realised we should no longer be seeing each other every day that I knew I could not live without you. It was then that I decided to propose to you."

"Why didn't you just propose in the ordinary fashion though, instead of thinking up your interesting novel?" I asked, intrigued.

"My dear Anya," Fyodor Mikhailovich replied in a voice filled with emotion, "when I realised how much you meant to me, I was plunged in despair and the intention to marry you seemed to me folly of the first order. Just think what different people we are! Take the difference in our ages for a start! I'm nearly an old man and you're little more than a child. I suffer from an incurable disease, have a gloomy and irritable disposition, while you are healthy and have a lively, radiant nature. I have almost lived out my life and have already seen untold suffering. You have always had a happy life and have all of it before you. Then, last but not least, I am poor and in debt. What can the future hold for us? Either we shall be unhappy together and after torturing ourselves for a few years separate, or, on the other hand, we may come to truly love each other for the rest of our lives and be happy."

It troubled me to hear those self-deprecating words from Fyodor Mikhailovich and I objected heatedly: "But, darling, you're exaggerating everything! There is no real difference between us. If we really love each other, then we shall become real friends and know untold happiness. I am afraid of something else: how can you, such a talented, clever and educated man choose as your companion through life an empty-headed young girl with virtually no education in comparison to yours, although I did graduate from school with a silver medal (a fact I was very proud of in those days). How ill-prepared I am to go through life hand in hand with you. I am worried that you may soon see through me, grow annoyed and vexed that I am unable to grasp your ideas. That difference between us is the greatest misfortune of all!"

Fyodor Mikhailovich hastened to reassure me with many flattering words. After that we returned to the subject of his proposal which I had brought up.

"I hesitated for a long time before I took that step," Fyodor Mikhailovich explained. "A man who no longer enjoys the advantages of youth or good looks asking for the hand of a young girl and meeting with a refusal might well appear ridiculous, and I did not wish to look ridiculous in your eyes. You might well have answered that you loved another. Your refusal would have led to coolness between us and made our former friendly relationship unthinkable. I would have lost a friend, the only person who, in the whole of the last two years,

has shown a really sincere sympathy for my plight. I repeat that I was feeling so alone that the thought of losing your friendship and support was more than I could bear. So I decided that I would find out your feelings on the subject by outlining the plan of a new novel to you. That was to have made it easier to bear your refusal, for we were discussing the heroes of the novel not ourselves."

For my part I told Fyodor Mikhailovich about all that I had gone through during his literary proposal, how I had misconstrued it at first, about my jealousy and envy towards Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya, etc.

Clearly surprised by all I told him, Fyodor Mikhailovich commented: "It would seem that I took you unawares and forced an acceptance out of you! Well, that means that the novel I conjured up on that occasion was the best I have ever written: its success was immediate and made the desired impression! "

## KORNEI CHUKOVSKY

A man of versatile talent and vast erudition, Kornei Chukovsky (1882–1969) is known, first and foremost, as a children's writer. For fifty years he wrote for children. He said about himself: "The best form of rest I know is daily contact with children.... Without this contact life loses all its beauty for me, and in this contact I see a source of spiritual health and happiness." Chukovsky, the author of *Wash 'em Clean*, *Telephone*, *The Stolen Sun* and many other stories in verse for children, is loved by

*Stolen Sun* and many other stories in verse for children, is loved by children the world over.

However, the range of Chukovsky's interests extended far beyond children's literature. His literary studies and numerous translations were highly commended both in the Soviet Union and abroad. Kornei Chukovsky was awarded the Lenin Prize for this work and made an Honorary Doctor of Literature at Oxford University.

Kornei Chukovsky lived a long and fruitful life, during which he met many remarkable men, Gorky and Mayakovsky, Repin and Blok, Lunacharsky and Makarenko. He recounted these meetings in a book of memoirs called *Contemporaries*. This book also contains an essay on Chekhov, one of the chapters from which is included in this collection.



Arizon Texas



Anton Chekhov. Photograph. 1901



## CHEKHOV

### I

There was in Russia a critic, severe and fault-finding, who remained stubbornly hostile to Chekhov's brilliant work and regarded him over a period of many years as a wretched scribbler.

Even now, half a century later, it is irritating to read his crabbed and harsh opinions of the great writer's works. Trumpery—rubbish—nonsense—rag-chewing—indigestible balderdash—soggy fudge—such were the epithets this critic applied to almost every new work of Chekhov.

*Ivanov* had scarcely appeared in print when this enemy nicknamed it "Ivan the Fool", "stillbirth", "playlet". Even the marvellous story *The Steppe*, the only paean to Russia's boundless spaces to be found in world literature after Gogol, was dismissed as "a trifle", and such early masterpieces as *The Malefactor*, *On the Eve of the Trial*, *First Aid*, *Work of Art*, now part of the treasure-house of world literature, came in for the same contemptuous treatment being termed "flat and poor". He called his *Tragedian Despite Himself* "a wretched little play, a flat and stale joke", and his *Proposal* "a notoriously stupid play"....

And, most remarkable of all, this harsh, hypercritical judge, who so angrily rejected practically every one of Chekhov's works, was, who do you think?—Anton Pavlovich Chekhov himself. It was he who called the plays trumpery, the stories rubbish.

Over four thousand of his letters to relatives, friends and acquaintances have survived and it is characteristic of him that he himself never once referred to his writings as creative. He seemed to be ashamed of applying such a high-flown word to his own work. When a woman writer called him a proud master he hastened to joke the lofty title aside: "Why do you call me a proud master? Only turkey-cocks are proud."

Not considering himself justified in calling his inspired work creation, he refers to it in all his letters, especially during the first decade of his literary activities, in the most casual manner: "I have scribbled down a comic number ... a bit on the vulgar side, and rather boring...", "I'll see if I can't grind out something sourish...", "Your letter came while I was jotting down a rubbishy little story...", "Just polished off a short novel...", "Snipped off a couple of stories...", "Dashed off a comedy, without turning a hair."

Such were the terms in which he invariably referred to the powerful and complex processes of his literary achievements—whether these were *A Tedious Business*, *The Duel*, *Vanka* (now included in many text-books and anthologies), or *The Party*, written with the force of a Tolstoi.

He later discontinued the use of such epithets but still spoke of his best works in tones just as unflattering.

"I have completed a play—*The Seagull*. I don't think it will ever add up to much. In general, I am not much of a playwright."

"As dull as ditch-water," he wrote of his story *The Lights*, "and it's so full of pretentious philosophysing that it's just sickening..."; "I am reading what I have written, and it's nauseating to a degree, simply repelling."

And despite the fact that by the end of the eighties he held first place in his generation of writers, he continued to maintain in his letters that, if it came to a literary hierarchy, his would be the thirty-seventh place, while, as regards Russian art as a whole, it would be the ninety-eighth. Apparently, however, even this seemed too much for his modesty, and he substituted a still lower figure in a letter to a relative in Taganrog. Mentioning Tchaikovsky, he said: "He is Celebrity Number Two in St. Petersburg and Moscow, Lev Tolstoi being Celebrity Number One; as for me I am Celebrity Number 877."

He seemed to have taken a strict vow in his youth never to boast to anyone whatsoever of his literary prowess, and never to let anyone know how seriously, severely and exactly he regarded his talent. A profound writer, he was forever harping on his "frivolity". "Of all Russian writers now prospering," he wrote to Vladimir Korolenko in 1887, "I am the most frivolous, the least serious." And that was after he had written such poignant works as *Happiness*, *At Home*, *Verochka*, *A Bad Business*, and that significant story *On the Road*, in which Korolenko discerned such a true understanding of the "Russian seekers after the good" roaming the wide world.

True to his resolution not to let anyone see the serious, arduous side of his literary work, he did all he could to conceal from outsiders the toil it involved. He always worked to the limit of human powers, but very seldom, and then only to his most intimate friends, did he acknowledge how difficult he found it to write.

"I've written a story.... I've been toiling over it day and night, sweating like anything and working myself almost into a stupor.... My elbow aches from writing and my head is swimming." He very seldom made such admissions, in fact, he was always assuring people of his incredible laziness: "I have a real talent for idling...", "Marvellous laziness ... I am the laziest writer in the world...", "Lazy Ukrainian blood runs through my veins...", "As lazy as ever...", "I spend my days in idleness ... I'm a Ukrainian peasant, a lazy fellow. Laziness intoxicates me, like ether...", "Bucolic laziness dominates all my feelings...."

Not wishing others to realise the enormous burden of "staggering work" he had to carry he invariably made out his rare moments of leisure to be his normal state.

When in 1888 the Academy of Sciences awarded him the Pushkin Prize for his book *In the Twilight*, he wrote to a friend: "I must have got it for catching lobsters."

Naturally, much of this must be attributed to his excessive reserve, his reluctance to allow anybody to get an insight into his inner mind. "There is no one around me who needs my sincerity or who has a right to it," he admitted in an unusually frank letter. He had long made it a habit to conceal from those around him all which concerned his creative personality, his literary aspirations and ideas, and he preferred to laugh them off rather than allow outsiders into his private world.

So the casual and ironical tone that marked his appraisals of his own writings served at times as a kind of self-defence against intrusion of his inner life by strangers.

But more often than not the cause of all this was that "discontent" with himself which appears to be part of none but Russian talents.

This dissatisfaction with himself was at its peak from 1887 to 1889, when for the first time he became aware of his own fame.

## II

This fame was a surprise to himself. But recently he has been one of the vulgar crowd of cheap journalists working for third-rate papers. But at first individuals and then groups of

admirers appeared in St. Petersburg, who, to Chekhov's astonishment, greeted him with such enthusiasm when he first arrived in that city that, as he later acknowledged, "for a couple of months my head was turned by the laudatory incense".

"Returned from St. Petersburg some days ago. Bathed in glory there and sniffed up incense."

"I'm the most fashionable writer in St. Petersburg," he wrote to his relatives.

This homage held out a promise of an ensured future and, in the first place, of complete escape from the penury that had oppressed him since his childhood. From his student years, he had had to support his sister, brother, mother and father; the time had now come when he could breathe freely, after ten years of enforced hackwork.

Besides, his sudden rise to fame had brought him into the select circle of outstanding men of his time, such whom his former journalist colleagues could never have even dreamt of meeting. His new friends included Grigorovich, Korolenko, Terpigorev, Sergei Maximov, Leskov, Yakov Polonsky, Pleshcheyev, and the great Tchaikovsky, all of whom counted him one of themselves.

Here is what Pleshcheyev wrote to him after reading his story *The Steppe* in the manuscript:

"It's simply delicious, imbued with such poetry that I have nothing else to say about it, and have no remarks to make except that I feel enraptured... I haven't read anything with such vast enjoyment for a long time... Garshin is delirious about it... Boborykin thinks the world of you, and considers you as the most gifted of all living writers of fiction."

"Your most sincere admirer," wrote Tchaikovsky at the end of a letter to Chekhov.

"To Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, from an admirer of his talent," was the inscription Polonsky made in a complimentary copy of a book he had written.

There was, indeed, another writer, whom some critics ranked together with Chekhov, to which fact the indignation of Grigorovich reacted by exclaiming: "Why, he isn't even worth to kiss the traces left by a flea that might bite Chekhov!"

It so happened that it was at that happy time that Chekhov's gift grew and flourished as never before. Following his drama *Ivanov*, a play which summed up many burning problems of the time and was a resounding success at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, and his story *The F* which provided a profound treatment of the theme raised with

such inner anguish by Garshin, namely, the personal responsibility of all for the fate of victims of the then social system, he published *A Tedious Business*, which even Mikhailovsky, who was so hostile to Chekhov and revealed a total inability to understand his writings, described in a review as "the finest and best" of what Chekhov had ever written.

It was at that time, too, that the first edition appeared of his new book *In the Twilight*. "I have been told," Pleshcheyev wrote to him from St. Petersburg, "that your book will be an outstanding success and that the publishers can't keep pace with the demand."

This run of luck earned him the nickname of Potyomkin.\* Even Chekhov himself spoke of himself in Pushkin's words, "the Fortune's low-born pet".

In 1889 an exhibition of paintings by Semiradsky was opened with much pomp and ceremony in St. Petersburg, and there was one picture there which made a sensation—a nude of the beauty Phryne being gaped at by the crowd.

"There are two celebrities in St. Petersburg just now," wrote Chekhov. "Semiradsky's nude Phryne and my clothed self."

But the more his admirers praised him (one of them even calling him a whale among writers), the more exacting he was to himself and to his works, now so highly valued. Summing up his literary successes in the end of 1889, which was the happiest period of his literary life, he confessed that he had behind him "any amount of errors and absurdities, tons of scribbled-over paper, an academic award, Potyomkin's good luck, and not a single line which has in my own eyes the slightest literary significance.... I long to hide somewhere for five years or so and give myself up to painstaking, serious work. I need to study, to learn everything from the very beginning again, for as a writer I am a sheer ignoramus."

In another letter he was even more self-deprecating:

"As for myself, I find no satisfaction in my work, because it is so insignificant.... It's never too soon to question myself, whether I am doing something worthwhile, or trifling.... My feelings tell me that I am engaged in producing piffling rubbish." And here are some extracts from other letters:

"No, we are not writing what is needed!"

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\* Potyomkin G. A. (1739–1791)—a Russian statesman and diplomat, a favourite of Empress Catherine II, was considered to be a very lucky man.—Ed.



"There are moments when I positively lose heart. Why and for whom do I write? For the public? How am I to know whether the public need me? "

"I am sick and tired of reading Chekhov! "

"I'm not pleased with my success ... too bad that so much rubbish has been written, and that so much that is good lies about as if it were mere literary scrap."

Thus, at the very height of his popularity this "spoilt child of Fortune" expressed agonised dissatisfaction, not merely with this or that story, but with the whole of his literary work, with its very essence. The moment he had won fame he longed to hide from it, to retire to some haven of quiet and obscurity in order, after five years of hard work, to turn out something that people really needed, for, as he himself said, "nobody wants present-day fiction". Elsewhere he expanded this idea: even its best exponents "only help the devil to multiply slugs and earwigs".

Fiction, the only thing to which he had so far given his whole soul, the artistic representation of contemporary Russian life, seemed to him "trivial", "unnecessary", "idle".

And he decided to produce no more of it. "I feel drawn towards work, but not literary work, which I am sick of."

This refusal to serve art, this denial by the artist of his own work would appear to be an element of only Russian talent, and that of the highest. In no other country, I think, shall we find men of such extraordinary gifts as Gogol and Tolstoi beginning to despise the great things they have done at the very height of their fame, and forcing themselves, on the ground that nobody needed their art, to retreat from it in the name of the more fruitful service to humanity.

The same thing, but fortunately not for long, happened to Chekhov. But while Gogol's and Tolstoi's renunciation of their achievements was demonstrative and loud, resounding throughout Russia and the whole world, Chekhov, accustomed by virtue of his reserved nature not to show his feelings, withdrew from literature in silence, without declarations or sermons.

But perhaps his bitter words about his "unnecessary" works of fiction were, as so often is the case, merely the fleeting doubt of the artist as to the reality of his talent?

No, it was a profound and lasting feeling. Otherwise Chekhov would not have been urged to what was then called "a mad act", but what we now call a deed of courage and self-sacrifice. I am speaking of his trip to the island of Sakhalin to study convict life.

## III

The authors of all kinds of writings about Chekhov were given to reiterating, one after the other, that they could not quite make out why Chekhov suddenly decided to make this perilous and exhausting journey in 1890.

"I still cannot understand why Chekhov had to go to Sakhalin," said Yezhov, a contemporary writer. "What for? Could it have been in search of topics? Who knows?"

"The reasons that impelled Chekhov to undertake so arduous a journey have not been sufficiently established to this day," our contemporary Sergei Balukhaty has written on the matter.

And yet if we only recall Chekhov's passionate discontent with himself, which was at its height at the time, his discontent with his art and his success, we shall understand the reason for his act. It was precisely because of the arduousness, the danger of this journey, because it led him away from the prosperous career of a successful and fashionable author, that he embarked upon it.

His sister Maria Pavlovna tells us that "at that time much was heard of the hard life of convicts on the island of Sakhalin. People murmured and voiced their indignation but that was all. Nobody took any measures.... Anton Pavlovich had no peace of mind after he discovered that the convicts were suffering so terribly. And he decided to go and see for himself." It was not enough for him to describe life; he wanted to get it changed.

Never in the habit of sparing himself, this time too, he made no effort to secure any privileges. The moment other writers achieved celebrity and emerged from poverty, they travelled about the world as tourists, visiting Paris or Rome, and here was Chekhov sentencing himself to a convict colony. He had not yet been abroad, and he felt greatly drawn to foreign countries. In the end of the eighties, just before going to Sakhalin, he was always drawing up plans for pleasure trips to Europe:

"I would like to live in Luca until June, and then go to Paris for a view of the French ladies."

"We are all fools for not going to Paris to visit the exhibition. As things are, one will die without seeing anything...."

"I would like to go to the Caucasus or to Paris."

"I'll come to St. Petersburg to auction my novel. When I sell it, I'll go to the Pyrenees."

"How much I would enjoy going to some place like Biarritz, where there's lots of music, and lots of women."

He might have rested on the shores of the Mediterranean, and yet he urged his sick self to make for the very worst place in the whole of Russia. And all he said in explanation was a laconic "One must break oneself in."

"This journey," he wrote to a friend, "is perpetual toil, physical and mental, lasting for six months, and it is what I need to shake off my sloth and laziness. One must break oneself in."

He began his preparations for the journey a long time before he started, going through stacks of scientific writings, as well as all sorts of newspapers and magazines, that might have anything, however remote, to do with the Devil's island he intended to visit. He studied the geology, the flora and fauna of Sakhalin, its history and ethnography, at the same time making a thorough study of prison régime, for he intended to wage a struggle against Russian convict colonies as a serious, well-equipped scholar.

That was how he broke with the fiction-writing which had palled on him, the fiction-writing that had brought him fame and money. However, he felt that he had to "break himself in", and spent months on end, poring over reference books on "soils, subsoils, loamy clay and clayey loam".

"This is such devilishly painstaking labour that I think I shall die of tedium.... Cockroaches seem to be scurrying about in my brain" (from such reading—*K. Ch.*).

And as soon as he had accomplished this infernal toil, he set off for that place to which most people are only driven by compulsion, thousands of miles through Siberia, where there was then no railway, travelling by a droshky or a wagon, across roadless wastes, bumping up and down over uneven ground, getting stuck in ruts, with wheels coming off, axles breaking, enough to shake one's inside to bits. He was so mercilessly shaken throughout the journey, and especially after passing through Tomsk, that his joints, collarbones, shoulders, spine all ached, his luggage jumping up and down pothole or mound, his hands and feet were numb with cold, and he was frequently left without food, since through inexperience he did not take adequate supplies, and was several times only saved from death and disaster by a miracle. One night his carriage overturned and he was all but run over by a couple of troikas. On another occasion his steamer struck a reef while sailing down a Siberian river. However, the innumerable discomforts and torments of the way were of course still worse than its dangers.

It is painful to read in his letters of the time that when fording a flooded river in his cart, he got his feet wet and was forced, in soaking felt boots, to jump continually into the icy stream to lead the horse. "Crossing a river, the rain lashing, the wind blowing, the luggage getting soaked, boots a mass of pulp again," he writes, and to all this must be added racking insomnia owing to the impossibility of stretching his limbs.

And yet he advanced steadily, and would not have been Chekhov of course if he had not written to a friend from one of his stopping places, after all this torture: "Had a very good journey.... I would wish anybody such a fine journey."

This is yet another instance of his reluctance to mention his ordeals and heroic feats to others. And it was indeed a heroic feat. The horrors of penal servitude had been described before by Russian writers, but these had learned about it on compulsion. For a young author in the happiest period of his career to have voluntarily embarked upon the appalling journey of eleven thousand versts, with the sole aim of in some slight degree alleviating the lot of oppressed and rejected folk, protecting them from the brutality of a soulless police régime, was a heroism such as the history of world literature has few examples of.

And this feat was accomplished by Chekhov in secret and in silence, and his only concern was that others should not regard it as a feat.

#### IV

Chekhov did not go to Sakhalin as an official representative, or as correspondent for some wealthy newspaper with an enormous circulation, but quite on his own, carrying no written recommendations, travelling as an ordinary mortal enjoying no privileges whatever. And when, soaked through and through by rain, after striding several versts along an appalling road up to his knees in water, he arrived at a hut in the company of some general, it was the general who was offered a bed and given a change of underwear, while Chekhov had to lie on the floor, wet to the skin.

And while in Sakhalin he undertook such a vast burden of work that the hardest-worked convict in those months was Chekhov himself.

While collecting material for the book he intended to write he undertook a most arduous commission—a census of the

population of that huge island, which is twice the area of Greece. Such a census could have been done by a large group of workers, and he did it alone, without aid, tramping from hut to hut, making the rounds of prison wards.

No wonder that this journey undermined a constitution by no means of the strongest. Moreover, on the way back he caught a cold, and his cough became worse than it had ever been. His all too early death must be attributed to the fact that just when he might have checked the tuberculous process then beginning, he spent several months in circumstances which would have been ruinous for a healthy man. In addition to this the journey ate up all his savings and plunged him afresh into prolonged poverty since he expended on it all the money he had (the sums spent on the drivers alone were exorbitant, and there were fellow travellers who turned up on the way and plundered him to the best of their ability). Four years later he wrote: "I spent so much time and money on that journey that I shall not be able to make up for it in ten years."

When he happened to be in an outlying and God-forsaken place, in conditions that were exhausting to a degree, he made the following belated complaint in a letter to Gorky:

"Oh, it was horrible, something resembling my travels about Siberia!"

And yet, when racked with coughing, and suffering from heart palpitation, he returned home, he began speaking of the journey with his usual irony. "Indeed, Sasha," he wrote to his elder brother, "I have done no end of travelling, and if you want to know what I have seen just read Krylov's fable *The Inquisitive One*: 'What butterflies, bugs, flies and roaches!'"

Of all his innumerable friends and acquaintances there was literally not one who had the faintest idea as to what had been the purpose of Chekhov's journey. Even Suvorin,\* a man who at that time stood closest to Chekhov, treated the enterprise with familiar levity, and sent him the following telegram to Irkutsk:

"Less boasting. It's a far cry from Stanley."

His brother Alexander, who was given to witticisms, greeted him on his return in the following words:

"Globe-trotting brother, rumours have reached me that, during your perigrinations, you have lost the last remnants of your brains, and have returned more stupid than when you left."

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\* Suvorin A. S. (1834–1912)—journalist, publisher of the reactionary newspaper *Novoye Vremya*.—Ed.

The feuilletonist Burenin wrote the following bantering verse on Chekhov's return home:

"Chekhov, that talented writer,  
Dashed off to distant Sakhalin,  
Where he roamed amidst the rocks  
In search of inspiration.  
But when he found none,  
He hurried home post-haste.  
The moral of this fable is simple:  
Why look for inspiration away from home? \*\*

All these appraisals contained much free-and-easy familiarity but not a shred of respect for the exploit that Chekhov had performed out of a sense of patriotism. This friendly sniggering continued among his friends after his return too.

In reply to a letter (not extant) from Suvorin, Chekhov twice refers to his correspondent's sneers at his Sakhalin book, its "gravity", "learnedness" and "dry tone". And Chekhov objects: "My *Sakhalin* ought not to come out in a magazine, of course ... but I think the little book will be of use. You shouldn't laugh at it, anyhow."

Chekhov's hope was unfounded—no use was made of the little book. It was only after his death that a learned authority, Professor M. Chlenov, wrote in the university newspaper that "when we obtain our sorely-needed chair for the study of the geographic distribution of disease in our country, *The Island of Sakhalin* will undoubtedly serve as a model for all such works".

But during Chekhov's lifetime the university medical professors merely shrugged their shoulders at the suggestion of a degree being conferred upon the author of this "model" book. "What? A degree for Antosha Chekhonté? \*\* Impossible.

Chekhov wrote *Sakhalin* at a time when his talent was perfectly mature, and he could certainly have produced an emotional work of shattering force, but, as so often happens in the realm of Russian art, he had to curb all his forcefulness and indignation and it was born anaemic. The censorship has much to answer for here. If Chekhov had written the book in his own way, the way in which he afterwards wrote *Peasants*, it could not have been published.

Shortly before, Chekhov, as we have already seen, had suffered the anguish of dissatisfaction with himself and all his

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\* An interlinear translation.—Tr.

\*\* Pen-name used by Chekhov in his early humorous stries.—Ed.

"unwanted" fiction writing, and had expressed a stubborn desire to escape as far as possible from all he termed "rubbish", so as to devote himself to "painstaking and serious work". Indeed, he did get away from it all, first travelling in the interior of Siberia and the convict island of Sakhalin, and then engaging in the writing of a scholarly publicist book which took up about a year of laborious preparation, following which it then expanded, with intervals, into several years.

Even here the main Chekhov theme may be traced—the tragedy and uselessness of the torments imposed on others by certain persons, individually and collectively. He shows with unexampled clarity, in the utmost detail, unhurriedly, methodically and exhaustively, backed by facts and figures, the soulless stupidity of this tsarist penal colony, the obtuse mockery of the downtrodden by the prosperous and the well-fed, and it is noteworthy that contemporary journalists and critics stubbornly maintained, against all the evidence, that Chekhov was a writer without principles or theories, indifferent to the interests and needs of Russian life.

And yet here, as in all his books, Chekhov was fighting for the happiness of the people. While his journey to Sakhalin was still in preparation, he wrote: "No further back than twenty-five or thirty years Russian travellers who visited Sakhalin performed feats for which a man might be worshipped." And it is scarcely necessary to add that he himself belonged to these Russian travellers. Neither Mikhailovsky, nor any of his hangers-on, who accused Chekhov of shameful indifference to social questions, ever made the most infinitesimal part of the sacrifices made by Anton Pavlovich in this one journey to Sakhalin.

Even the writing of this book demanded intense effort on Chekhov's part. He took a long time over it, with frequent intervals. He wanted to return to writing fiction and found the effort of pragmatic writing irksome.

As soon as the book was written he stopped mentioning the journey to Sakhalin in letters or in conversation. It might never have taken place. There is only one mention of *The Island of Sakhalin* in three volumes of correspondence with his wife, and even then the mere title is mentioned in passing. "It did not look as if he cared to recall that journey," says Potapenko. "I myself, who spent many days with him, never heard from him a single episode from that world."

Even in those cases when he was obliged to provide biographical details for the press, the journey to Sakhalin

occupied a very small place, and there was never a word about its difficulties. One more example of Chekhov's reluctance to show off his merits....

# V

Who was the foe he grappled with?  
It was himself, it was himself.

*Boris Pasternak*

Nobody who ever met Chekhov failed to observe in him a profoundly national trait—savage detestation of self-aggrandisement and boastfulness. It was unbelievable that the idol of the whole country was so utterly oblivious of his own fame. To say that he was oblivious of his own fame is indeed an understatement—he resisted it, he threw all mention of it out of his biographies, he was ready to defend his right to be unremarkable, unknown.

He seemed to have set himself the task of keeping in the background, of suppressing his ego, not allowing his merits to crush others (“When people write about me, it upsets me...”); of refusing all privileges earned by his talent, so that there should be no barrier between himself and others; of never in any circumstances showing off or boasting.

“To read things about myself still more to write them for the press, is sheer torment for me,” he admitted again and again.

When the editor of *Nedelya* asked him in the nineties for a few autobiographical data he replied: “It would be gall and wormwood for me. I hate writing about myself.”

And he was really angry when the St. Petersburg magazine *Vsemirnaya Illyustratsia* referred to him as “highly gifted”. In a letter to the editor he objected to the epithet, stating his conviction that the best advertisement for a writer was modesty.

When his complete works were to appear he implored the publisher as a special favour not to include in the collection either his portrait or his biography. And he had his way. There is no biographical introduction to this edition, although according to well-established traditions there must always be a biographical sketch of the author at the beginning of the first volume of collected works.



"When I was in Paris the famous sculptor Bernstamm wanted to do my portrait, but I wouldn't let him," he wrote to Iordanov in 1899.

And in 1901 he wrote in a letter to his wife: "Sofia Andreyevna Tolstaya photographed Tolstoi and me together. I'll ask her for a photograph and send it to you, only mind you don't let anybody make copies of it."

Just look through all the photographs of Chekhov with other people. You will see that with two or three exceptions he's always in the background, half hidden, or at best at one side. He could not bear the idea of being the centre of a group, or taking the first place. All his life he faithfully observed the austere rule which in his youth he laid down for his weak-willed brother and which he applied equally to himself: "Really talented people always keep in the shadow, among the crowd, avoiding self-display."

Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko recalled that Chekhov could not bear to talk about his works. "Let's talk of something else. Can't you find another subject? "

He could not bear to listen to praise of his talent.

This appears also in his correspondence with other writers where he speaks so much of their works and hardly anything of his own.

It would be a good idea for young writers to make a detailed study of Chekhov's biography and make it a model for their own behaviour, for it is first and foremost a manual of modesty in a writer.

In January 1900 the Academy of Sciences elected him an honorary member. This was the highest honour a writer could then achieve. But he seemed scarcely to notice the honour. Only on one occasion did he sign a jocose family letter "Academician Toto", and another time almost entered his high rank in his wife's passport: "At first I thought I would elevate you to the rank of wife to Honorary Academician, but afterwards I decided you would rather be the wife of a medical practitioner."

And that was how he registered her: "Wife of medical practitioner", in default of any still more modest and unassuming description.

"Anyone unacquainted with the writer would find it hard to single him out in a group of people he might be engaged in conversation with," wrote the priest S. Shchukin. "It was hard to distinguish him from others in any company," Suvorin wrote in his obituary. It was to him that Chekhov had written in the

eighties: "Nobody likes the ordinary man in everyone of us.... That is bad...."

There can scarcely have been another famous writer who expended so much effort simply to remain unnoticed in the crowd, in the ranks of "ordinary people". He never appeared on any platform or read his work aloud even in the most intimate circles, and he almost always sat in the back rows of the theatre.

The only condition he made to the library to which he sent thousands of books was that no one should mention his participation in the affairs of the library. And when they asked him for his photograph he promised to send one of Alphonse Daudet.

Stanislavsky described how Chekhov, despite the entreaties of the actors, refused to sit at the director's desk during a rehearsal of *The Cherry Orchard* and insisted on taking a seat in the very back row of the auditorium, in semi-darkness, so that no one seeing him there could have believed that this was the author of the play.

And how angry he was when, in a list of leading contributors, some magazine printed his own name in bigger type than the rest!

Self-dissatisfaction pursued him to the end of his life, that same feeling which in his youth made him call his plays "playlets" and his stories "trifles and rubbish".

Already an acknowledged classic, the author of *The Bishop* and *The Bride*, he never discussed his work or ideas even with those closest to him. "My dear child," he wrote to his wife, "I'm so sick of everything that I can't help feeling you and everybody else are sick of it too, and only speak about it out of politeness...."

"I say nothing about the stories I am writing because there is nothing new or interesting in them. One writes, reads what one has written, and realises that it's all been done before, it's all old, old...."

He was always and everywhere concerned with avoiding his fame and superiority because they might be offensive to others. Among his acquaintances was a writer, Vladimir Tikhonov by name; although he was not without ability, he could not of course hold a candle to Chekhov, yet the latter invited him to stay with him, in the following terms:

"My dear Vladimir Alexeyevich,

I am not inviting you to stay at my place in the country, because that would be to no avail. You are a proud man, as haughty and arrogant as Nebuchadnezzar. Were

you to be invited by the Prince of Coburg or the Khedive of Egypt, you would not hesitate to come, but an invitation from an insignificant Russian writer will merely make you smile contemptuously. That's rather a pity. Your pride prevents you from coming here, but you can't imagine the splendid sour cream I can offer you, the veal, the cucumbers that will appear in May, and the radishes!"

To avoid giving offence to an "insignificant Russian writer" by a display of arrogance, Chekhov described himself as insignificant and treated Tikhonov as though they had exchanged places.

He had a way, when talking to some third-rate writer, of saying: "You and I", just in case the terrible idea might arise that Chekhov considered himself any better.

"When Suvorin sees a poor play," he wrote to the selfsame Tikhonov, "he just hates the author, but *you and I* merely feel irritation, and voice our plaint; from that I draw the conclusion that Suvorin is suited to be a judge, or hunt with the hounds, while *we* (you, I, Shcheglov and the rest) have been fashioned by Nature in such a way as to be suited to be only the accused, and run with the hares."

Shortly after Vagner had described him as an elephant among writers, Chekhov said the following in a letter to Tikhonov:

"Despite Vagner, I believe that none of us, taken separately, will be either an 'elephant' among us, or any other kind of animal, and that we can do the job only through the efforts of an entire generation, and in no other way. We shall all of us be called, not Chekhov, Tikhonov, Korolenko, Shcheglov, Barantsevich, or Bezhetsky, but 'the eighties' or 'the end of the nineteenth century', a kind of team."

His excessive sensitiveness often caused him to apologise for perfectly imaginary offences.

"One day when we were dining together in Paris," he wrote to a wealthy friend, "you tried to persuade me to stay in Paris, offered to lend me money, and I refused, and it seemed to me my refusal hurt and annoyed you, it seemed to me that you parted with me coldly. I may have been mistaken. If I am right, however, I assure you, old man, on my word of honour, that it wasn't that I didn't want to be under an obligation to you...", etc., etc.

Chekhov was probably the only person who ever apologised to his friends for not borrowing from them!

He displayed the same ultra-delicacy towards those who had borrowed money for "several days" but were in no hurry to pay it back. On one occasion, to make one of his debtors shake off any sense of awkwardness, he even went so far as to attempt to assure him that he, Chekhov, was not always punctilious in repaying his debts.

"Please do not consider me a hard-hearted creditor," he wrote to a certain Yezhov, who was also a writer. "I owe somebody the hundred roubles you owe me; I am a debtor myself but I have no intention of returning the sum so soon. When I do pay that debt, I shall ask you to do the same; meanwhile do not trouble me with reminders about such things as debts."

And when in April 1894, on his country estate, he felt faint, a thought came into his mind which probably would never have occurred to anyone else in like circumstances: "A bit awkward to fall down and die in front of strangers."

He even wanted to die politely, so as not to cause anyone embarrassment.

He also had a high appreciation of delicacy in others.

"Good breeding," he wrote, "does not consist in avoiding spilling gravy on the tablecloth, but in not noticing when somebody else has done so."

## VI

Perhaps none of those who lauded Chekhov's concern for others, his delicacy and modesty, thoroughly realised that, apart from his inherent qualities, much of this must be ascribed to what he called "training".

"One must break oneself in," he wrote before setting forth on his heroic journey to Sakhalin.

"To break oneself in", to discipline oneself, to exact from oneself almost impossible moral deeds, and to keep a strict watch on their execution, such was the fundamental essence of his life, and he was his own hardest taskmaster. Only by such means did he attain his moral beauty, only through unremitting self-perfection. Quite by chance his own admission that he consciously cultivated one of his best personal traits has come down to us. When his wife remarked in a letter on his obliging and gentle character he answered (1903): "I must tell you that I am by nature harsh and impatient, etc., etc., but I always try to restrain my feelings, for a decent person does not give way to them. Formerly I used to behave atrociously."

"I must confess to being excessively excitable with my family. I am too excitable in general. I am often rude and unfair," he confessed to his brother in his early years.

It is this that makes Chekhov's biography so instructive—a man of strong will, who used to "behave atrociously" in his youth, learned to conquer his impulses, cast out of himself all that was petty and trivial, cultivate a delicacy and gentleness which not a single writer of his generation could lay claim to. And his well-known modesty, his perpetual striving towards obscurity, his evasion of fame were not merely instinctive, but the result of "training".

"I'm a desperately ambitious man," he admitted in an intimate letter. "I only pretended not to mind, I was quite a-flutter," he wrote after the St. Petersburg production of *Ivanov*. The way in which he took the famous fiasco of *The Seagull* in 1896 shows how much literary success meant to him. "He was extremely sensitive to the reception of his writings," Suvorin testified in his Chekhov obituary. In his diary Suvorin wrote: "Chekhov is very touchy. When I gave him my opinion of the causes of the failure of *The Seagull*, he listened impatiently. He could not help being profoundly upset about it."

When Chekhov cold-shouldered his own fame, he was driving away something that had always held out great attraction to him. Indeed, it would have been unnatural for one with such a love of life and a tremendous sociability to remain indifferent to the charms and allurements of fame. Let us recollect that his early letters contained lines expressing an un-Chekhovian boastfulness about his successes and, besides, an un-Chekhovian concern for the build-up of his literary reputation.

We can also recall the fury with which he attacked the unfortunate Nikolai Efros only because that long-standing admirer of his talent, friend of his family and historian of the Moscow Art Theatre had made some minor departures from the text of *The Cherry Orchard* in describing the contents of the play in a newspaper article. "I have a feeling," Chekhov wrote, "as though somebody has given me slops to swallow, and then poured the rest over me." "Tell Efros that I am no longer acquainted with him.... What a nasty animal he is!", and so on.

This could not have happened if Chekhov had not been so terribly ill at the time. The check he had held himself in throughout his life had slackened because of the illness, and that makes it all the clearer what strict control he had had to exercise over his passions.

Two writers who had the opportunity to observe him more closely and for longer than others, Leontyev-Shcheglov and Potapenko, each wrote in their memoirs that Chekhov's high-mindedness was a carefully cultivated quality.

"During the first period of youthful gaiety and unparalleled success," writes Leontyev-Shcheglov, "Chekhov occasionally displayed deplorable, schoolboy-like conceit, even, one may say, rudeness. But by the time of his third visit to St. Petersburg these jarring notes had utterly disappeared."

Chekhov, as Potapenko justly remarked, is frequently represented in memoirs "as being not made of ordinary flesh and blood, as if he were a saint, raised above daily life, one without human weaknesses, passions, errors. But Chekhov was no angel, no saint." And his better spiritual traits were, according to Potapenko, "the result of anguished inner struggle, they were trophies won the hard way."

The same was seen in him by Sergeyenko, who, when he met Chekhov after a lapse of several years, found him with a "*disciplined will* and with a constantly functioning inner metronome".

He was training himself throughout his life, but most rigorously in the eighties. It is noteworthy that it was during that period that his correspondence began more and more frequently to contain such words as "ill breeding", "good breeding", "well-bred". The subject was obviously of concern to him. He wrote as far back as 1883:

"Our gentlemen actors have all the necessary qualities; they lack only one thing—*good breeding*."

And later:

"The public are *ill-bred*."

"One who ... is *well-bred* and of a loving nature will not allow himself to....", etc.

"You have only one shortcoming.... It is your extreme *ill-breeding*."

"We can smooth out inequality. *Education* and culture can achieve much in this respect."

"I have no faith in our intelligentsia; they are hypocritical, false-hearted, hysterical and *ill-bred*."

And so on and so forth. All this had a special significance in coming from Chekhov. He termed well-bred anyone who, like him, had developed as a result of lengthy self-discipline a sense of decency. In this self-education and subjugation of the instincts, he discerned, not mental gymnastics as an end in itself, but man's duty to his fellow creatures, since the common

weal, as he saw it, depended in a large measure on the decency shown by all.

After emerging from the servile atmosphere of his early life, which he loathed with a burning hate that imbued everything he ever wrote, he realised, even in his early years, that only one capable of purging himself from its blight would be able to fight vulgarity and corruption in human souls. And since the two main vices of vulgar souls which seemed to him the worst were oppression of the weak and obsequiousness to the strong, he made up his mind that these were the failings he must eradicate in himself. The former in its innumerable aspects—rudeness, conceit, arrogance, superciliousness, boasting, etc.—he, as it were, burned out of himself with red-hot iron, but it was harder to deal with the latter. It required heroic effort from one born and bred in conditions of want and abasement, taught to bow low before an official and grovel before a money-bag, to foster in himself such splendid pride. He acknowledges this himself in the well-known letter to Suvorin:

“Write a story about a young man,” (meaning himself.—*K. Ch.*) “the son of a serf, an ex-storekeeper, a choirboy, a schoolboy, a student, brought up on respect for rank, kissing priests’ hands, and the worship of others’ ideas, grateful for a crust of bread, flogged time and again, going out tutoring in broken boots, fighting, torturing animals, fond of dining with rich relatives, playing the hypocrite before God and men without the slightest need, simply from the consciousness of his own insignificance—write how this young man squeezes the slave out of himself one drop at a time and how he wakes up one fine morning to feel that in his veins flows not the blood of a slave but true human blood.”

An astonishing admission cited by all who write of Chekhov in admiration.

But it is by no means everyone who realises that these words describe a miracle. It might be thought that if obsequiousness before all who are in the slightest degree stronger has been instilled in one from childhood, if one has been brought up to regard oneself as a flunkey, if one’s parents taught one to worship wealth and power, to flatter, to kowtow to them, try as one might to eradicate the habit of servility in oneself, it would to the end of one’s life come out in gestures, smiles, the very tones of the voice. And the fact that Chekhov emerged victorious here too testifies to one of his rarest traits, of which more will be said later. For the moment we will note and emphasise that Chekhov succeeded, as few have done, in freeing

his spirit from all traces of servility, obsequiousness, self-abasement and flattery. It is generally believed that self-respect is an inherent quality, one that cannot be taught. And yet Chekhov taught himself this. Though suppressed in him by vulgar influences this quality belonged to Anton Pavlovich even in his early childhood (as abundantly proved by the letters and reminiscences of his elder brother), and yet enormous will-power was required to shake off these influences.

Go through all his letters; you will not find a single line that will in the least humiliate him before others, or contain a single obsequious word for the sake of the slightest advantage. In one of his very early letters, he advised his brother Mikhail to develop self-respect in himself:

"There's one thing I don't like: why do you call yourself my 'paltry and insignificant little brother'? Are you so aware of your nonentity? All people cannot be alike, of course, but do you know where you can admit your insignificance? You can do that with God, or beauty, or intellect, or Nature, but not with people. With them you must have an awareness of your dignity. You are no knave, but an honest man, so respect yourself for an honest man, and know that an honest man is no nonentity."

Several years later, he made the same demand to his elder brother, who was living with a common-law wife and was truckling to his devout father so as to get him to regard his cohabitation with favour.

Chekhov saw servility in this kind of behaviour.

"Forgive me, brother," he wrote in 1883, "but why should you be apologetic if you are not asking for trouble? Why should it matter to you how some schismatic or other looks upon your cohabitation? Why should you fawn on him, to what purpose? Let him see things in any light he wishes. You know that you are right, so hold firmly to your stand. The essence of life lies in (unobsequious) protest; if I were you, if I had a family, I would allow nobody..." etc.

By the mid-eighties Chekhov had been able to completely eliminate from his system the last vestiges of servility; self-respect had become the prominent feature in his personality.

It is characteristic of him that while he was hail-fellow-well-met with numbers of people, especially in his youth, while he called his plays playlets and his stories trifles, no one ventured to be familiar with him, to clap him on the shoulder. An exception to this may have been his brother Alexander, but beneath even his rough jokes profound respect could be sensed.



Obviously Chekhov excelled in the art of unbending without loss of dignity, of showing indulgence without weakness. For all his politeness he never shrank from putting in his place anyone who wounded ever so slightly his own self-respect.

In 1888 a mediocre but influential critic, who had written a great deal about Chekhov, sent him an invitation through a third person, convinced that the young writer would be glad to make his acquaintance in the hope of securing the favour of future reviews in the most powerful paper in Moscow. But Chekhov, who would visit all and sundry, refused outright, much to the offence of the critic. Chekhov then wrote to a common friend that in his opinion the critic had no right to be offended.

"I couldn't go and see him," he wrote, "because I don't know him. In the second place, I don't visit people I care nothing for, just as I don't attend dinners in honour of writers whose books I haven't read. In the third place, the time hasn't yet come for me to go to Mecca to worship...."

Nobody is likely to describe the feeling dictating this letter as meekness. It is more like aggressiveness. Chekhov always behaved aggressively when he had to spring to the defence of his honour as a writer. He preferred to be gruff and rude rather than to display the faintest obsequiousness before anyone considered powerful and influential.

Located close to Chekhov's modest estate of Melikhovo was the rich estate of Otrada, which belonged to Count Orlov-Davydov. In the autumn of 1896, Chekhov was to have met the Count on some important business, but at first deferred doing so.

"If he receives me like a grandee and addresses me in a high-handed and Jovian manner, I shall not talk to him, and will simply leave."

He permitted himself no compromise in such matters, and held in contempt those writers who had failed to develop a similar sense of dignity. When the writer Yasinsky became a contributor to *Novoye Vremya*, which had published some scurrilous remarks about him from the pen of Victor Burenin, and pretended that nothing had happened, Chekhov wrote the following words about him:

"By appearing in *Novoye Vremya*, he has spat in his own face. No cat in the world has ever tormented a mouse in the way Burenin has treated Yasinsky, yet how has the latter reacted? There is a limit to everything, and if I were Yasinsky I

would refuse to show my face not only in *Novoye Vremya* but even in the street where its editorial offices are housed."

His long friendship with Suvorin may serve as an example. Suvorin was at that time both power and authority—editor of the biggest newspaper in Russia, a man with widespread connections and, moreover, exceedingly wealthy. A close friendship developed between the two men. Chekhov's enemies, his pretended friends and his enviers maintained stubbornly that he enjoyed all sorts of privileges—mainly financial—thanks to this friendship, for by that time Suvorin had no disinterested friends.

To those who did not know Chekhov this slander sounded like the truth, for Suvorin loved to act the patron. His purse was always open to the many writers who were on a friendly footing with him. Maslov, Skalkovsky, Yasinsky, Gippius, Prince Baryatinsky, Merezhkovsky and Potapenko got great sums of money from him. He gave Amfiteatrov alone not less than eighteen thousand roubles over a short period of time. It seemed therefore only natural that his favourite contributor and closest intimate should also enjoy his generosity.

Nobody knew then and nobody would have believed that all the disadvantages of this ruinous friendship fell to Chekhov's lot, and all the advantages to Suvorin's. At the very beginning of their intimacy, Suvorin, seeing that Chekhov needed money, offered him a generous advance, but Chekhov put an end once and for all to this by the following fastidiously scrupulous lines:

"I tell you frankly and between ourselves that when I began working for *Novoye Vremya* I felt as if I had found a gold mine ... and vowed to write as often as possible, so as to get as much money as possible—there's nothing wrong in that. But when I got to know you better and when you became my friend, I became less eager, and work for which I got paid in your newspaper lost its attractions for me.... I began to be afraid our relations would be darkened by somebody's idea that I need you not as a human being, but as an editor."

A fairly common situation: the poor man, proudly defending his spiritual independence, is reluctant to enjoy the benevolence of his wealthy friend. But before three years had passed, the financial relations of the proud poor man and the wealthy man had assumed a paradoxical, an almost incredible nature. It was not Chekhov who profited by the generosity of his rich friend, as was continually asserted in journalistic circles at that time, but the rich friend who got more and more money out of his friendship with Chekhov.

For about twelve years Suvorin was almost the sole publisher of Chekhov's works. It is hardly likely that he wished to heap up excessive profits for himself in this case, but his publishing firm was run on such predatory lines that throughout the years when he was publishing *Kashtanka*, *Sombre People*, *Peasants*, *Children* and so on, Chekhov, at the most moderate estimates, was getting less than half of what he could have got from another publisher, especially when it is borne in mind that Suvorin, with characteristic unconcern, published the books in the most casual manner, and at intervals which spelt ruin for the author.

At last even Chekhov realised this, but he preferred remaining Suvorin's "patron" to being patronised by Suvorin. This friendship, in addition to enormous moral detriment (by now Suvorin's paper had become frankly reactionary), brought him heavy financial losses. When they parted company, however, he had the satisfaction of feeling that in the atmosphere of servile obsequiousness, careerism and place-seeking which surrounded Suvorin, he alone had been able to preserve his self-respect to the end. The same absence of servile instincts invariably marked all his actions.

On one occasion, when he was passing through the city of Yekaterinburg, he felt he would like to make the acquaintance of some relatives he had never met. On learning that they were all smug and conceited people, he gave up the idea. He wrote to his sister that he had flatly refused to have anything to do with them.

"Chekhov was a proud man," wrote the theatrical critic A. Kugel, who was considered the "scourge of theatreland" and feared by actors and playwrights alike. He admitted that it was for that very reason that Chekhov simply ignored him. And Chekhov demanded similar dignity from others.

"Why, oh why does Savva Morozov invite aristocrats to his house?" he protests in a later letter. "They eat up everything and then laugh at him for a barbarian. I'd kick them out if I were he."

He had not the slightest tendency to humbleness and meekness. Innate in him was the trait that, while he cultivated in himself boundless indulgence for others, he never let it develop into flattery, self-abasement or mere obligingness, but invariably made the human dignity he had developed in himself the yardstick of his behaviour.

The moral code that ruled all his life was full of endless *musts*. One of his unsigned early articles contained the demand

that "one must rejoice at another's success of any kind, since any success, even the smallest, is already a step towards happiness and truth".

The entire story of his life shows that he never swerved from the observance of this almost impracticable rule: he actually taught himself to rejoice at any success scored by another.

There were other two remarkable *musts* that he began to demand of himself with the utmost rigour immediately after his journey to Sakhalin:

"I must work hard; everything else can go to the devil. The main thing is playing the game; the rest will come of itself."

## VII

It would have been strange indeed if, while trying to "re-educate" himself, Chekhov had not endeavoured to do the same for others too. The re-education of all around him was his favourite occupation and he believed with remarkable simplicity in the educational power of precept and preaching or, as he has himself expressed it, sermonising.

"Fate has made a nannie of me, so that *volens nolens* I must not lose sight of pedagogical measures."

Even while flirting with the beautiful Lika he sends her, amidst all sorts of jokes and fooling, a veritable sermon:

"You have not the slightest inclination for regular work. That is why you don't feel well, you're in the blues or tearful, and why you girls are all fit for nothing but giving sixpenny lessons.... Don't irritate me with your idleness another time, and whatever you do, don't make excuses. When it is a matter of urgent work or breaking your word I cannot accept excuses. I can't accept them and I can't understand them."

Even in what is practically a love-letter to his young wife he writes:

"You *mustn't* do that, darling! *Never* be unjust. Be very particular about fair play, very particular."

All these *musts* and *must nots* were inexorable demands he presented to all those close to him, because it was to himself that he presented them in the first place. Towards the end of his life, he tried to instil an elementary sense of self-respect and pride even in Shcheglov-Leontiev:

"You are upset by Burenin and his like, but why, why do you have to associate with them; why do you place yourself in a position of dependence on such people? Why don't you leave

them if you hold them in contempt? Do not belittle yourself, dear Jean, do not belittle your talent ... be a free man ... escape to freedom...."

All this began when he was still Antosha Chekhonté. It is hard to realise that at a time when he was speaking of himself in letters as the most frivolous of authors, a writer of trivialities, when he was getting up what he called "orgies" at home, and his whole apartment, according to Shcheglov, "shook with laughter", he was privately working on the re-education of his family.

"In our family," his brother Mikhail remembers, "all sorts of abrupt remarks never before heard began to be made: 'That's wrong', 'Always be fair!', 'Don't tell lies!', and so on."

From his twentieth year he was the breadwinner and the head of a large family, he had plenty of charges—four brothers, a sister, and a father. His sister proved a willing pupil. His father, a petty despot accustomed to bullying his family, was as hard as flint, but at last Chekhov "re-educated" him too. His brothers gave him more trouble. Alexander was a writer and Nikolai a cartoonist; both had flabby souls, and when Chekhov poured out the vials of his pedagogical theories on them, they ran away. Neither amounted to anything, each wasting his talent. Their spiritual bankruptcy shows what would have been the fate of their distinguished brother but for the discipline to which he subjugated himself.

It is highly characteristic that his "sermons" alternated with reckless jokes, so that there was nothing insipid or dreary, nothing vegetarian in his insistent preaching. Most of his letters to his brother Alexander, when they did not touch on matters of business, were composed of two elements, which would seem incompatible in any pedagogical system—the flamboyant witticisms and the severest moralising. Chekhov found plenty of subjects for moralising, and some of them of the most unexpected nature. Learning, for example, that Alexander was getting fond of highly seasoned delicacies, Chekhov assured him insistently:

"Don't eat that rubbish, brother! It's filthy, disgusting.... At any rate don't feed Mosevna" (Alexander's daughter) "on anything and everything.... Do at least cultivate her digestive aestheticism! By the way, speaking of aestheticism—sorry, old man, but don't be a parent in name alone. Give a good example.... Children are greatly influenced by appearances. And your standards are very low.... And take another kind of

decency: don't swear! You'll spoil Katka (the cook.—*K. Ch.*) for one thing, and abuse Mosevna's ear-drums, for another."

It is hard to believe that this is a younger brother preaching to an elder one! However, the youngest brother's personality was dominant in the family, so that the other brothers found it perfectly natural to obey him.

One of Alexander's letters to Anton contains a curious recollection. Alexander was a big and strong boy of fourteen when the nine-year-old Anton entered the preparatory class at the Gymnasium. He displayed so much pride and severity towards his elder brother that the latter lost all sense of seniority.

"That was the first occasion on which your independence of character revealed itself," Alexander wrote to him in later years. "My authority of elder brother simply began to disappear."

This touched Alexander on the raw; he felt he could not relinquish his authority without a struggle and, to subdue Anton, he hit him on the head with a tin can. The younger boy went in search of their father, evidently to complain to him. It was clear that the furious parent would soon appear and give Alexander a thrashing. But Anton did not make any complaint. "Several hours later," Alexander recalled in his letter, "you *majestically* sailed past my shop-door in the company of Gavrila, on some errand for Father, and did not even look in my direction. I followed you with my eyes for quite a while and, without realising why, I burst into tears."

It was thus that the younger brother began to influence the elder one from a very early age. And when his older brother was over thirty, the younger one was still endeavouring to re-educate him and ennoble his nature.

"On my very first visit," he wrote to Alexander in 1889, "I was horrified by your disgusting, perfectly unjustified treatment of Natalia Alexandrovna and the cook. Forgive me, but it is not worthy of a decent and affectionate man to treat women so, whatever they may be themselves."

"I would ask you to remember," he goes on in the same letter, "that tyranny and lies (his father's—*K. Ch.*) ruined your mother's youth. Tyranny and lies poisoned our childhood to such an extent that the very memory is frightening and nauseating. Remember the horror and disgust we felt in those days when our father made a row at dinner because the soup was oversalted, or when he called our mother a fool.... Bullying is thrice accursed."

This indefatigable preaching may have had some slight effect on the dissolute Alexander, but Nikolai was utterly demoralised.

"It would be hard to find anybody more futile than our Nikolai," mourned Chekhov. "And the worst of it is he is a hopeless case. Nikolai is a rotter; a fine, powerful Russian talent is being ruined, and all for nothing."

Chekhov tried to correct him in letter after letter, one of which contained *in extenso* his code of anti-philistine morals. Although this is a much-quoted letter, we would like to refer to some of the more important passages, which reveal the self-discipline he practised.

Like the born educator he was, and with his keen desire to perfect himself and others, Chekhov had great faith in the art of pedagogy. His brother Mikhail once recalled that, in an argument with the well-known zoologist V.A. Vagner, the prototype of von Koren, Chekhov ardently insisted that instruction was more powerful than heredity, and that upbringing could overcome even degenerative qualities in the human mentality, which it was held at the time, inexorably predetermined behaviour.

In 1886 he wrote a severe letter to Nikolai, a letter which might even now serve as a course in practical ethics for many a weakling.

"You have only one fault," he writes. "And that is absolute lack of breeding. In my opinion well-bred people should satisfy the following conditions:

"1. They respect the individuality of others and are therefore always indulgent, gentle, courteous, accommodating.... They don't make a fuss about a hammer or a lost eraser; if they live with a person they don't make a favour of it, and when departing do not say 'you are impossible to live with'. They put up with noise, cold and overdone beef, facetiousness, strangers in the house....

"2. Their compassion is not only for beggars and cats. They suffer from what cannot be seen with the naked eye. They stay awake at night in order to help the Polevayev brothers, to pay for poor student-brothers, and to buy clothes for their mother.

"3. They respect the property of others and therefore pay their debts.

"4. They are truthful and fear lies like the plague. They don't even lie about trifles. A lie is an insult to the hearer and lowers the speaker in his eyes. They don't put on airs, but behave in public as they do at home, without trying to impress their

inferiors. They do not chatter or force their confidences uninvited on others; out of respect for their company they usually hold their tongues.

"5. They do not humble themselves in order to get sympathy. They do not play on other people's heart-strings in order to be pitied and petted. They do not say: 'No one understands me', or 'I have thrown myself away', for all this is done just for effect, it is vulgar, stale, false.

"6. They are not snobs. They are not taken in by false values such as introductions to celebrities, handshakes from the drunken Plevako,\* the enthusiasm of a chance acquaintance in the drawing-room, or a tavern reputation. They laugh at such phrases as 'I am a representative of the press', which are fit only for people like Rodzevich and Levenberg. They do not boast of cheap successes or claim that they are admitted where others are not. True talent is always to be found in dark corners, amidst the crowd, far from the footlights. Krylov\*\* himself says empty vessels make the most noise.

"7. If they possess a talent they respect it. For its sake they sacrifice leisure, women, wine and worldly vanities. They are proud of that talent. They do not drink with elementary-school inspectors and guests of Skvortsov, realising that it is their function not to live with such people but to exert an educational influence on them. Besides, they are fastidious.

"8. They cultivate aestheticism. They cannot sleep in their clothes, endure bugs in cracks in the wall, breathe bad air, walk about on a floor covered with spittle, live on hurriedly warmed-up food. They will curb and ennoble to the utmost the sexual instinct.... They expect a woman to be not merely a bed-fellow, they are opposed to sheer toiling and moiling and to a mind only showing itself in an infinite ability to tell lies. They, especially artists, need freshness, elegance, humanity, the capacity ... for motherhood. They don't gulp down vodka at random, or sniff inside cupboard doors; they know they are not pigs. They drink when they are at leisure, when a suitable occasion arises. For they require *mens sana in corpore sano*.

"And so on.... All this is what being well-bred means. It means never to sink beneath the level of the society in which one finds oneself; it's not enough to read nothing but the *Pickwick Papers*, and memorise Faust's monologue...."

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\* Plevako, F. N.—famous lawyer.—*Ed.*

\*\*Krylov, I. A. (1769—1844)—famous Russian fable-writer.—*Ed.*



This letter illuminates the admirable pedagogical system Chekhov used to train himself.

This youthful moral code may seem to us almost miraculous, but still more miraculous is the fact that Chekhov was able to subordinate his whole life to it, that every rule laid down by him in this letter did not, as often in such cases, remain on paper, but was carried out to the last detail, and since neither in the social life of the time nor in his immediate *milieu* could he find the least support for the self-education he practised, he had to rely for that exclusively on himself. Anybody can set himself rules which are almost too difficult to put into practice, but to carry them out undeviatingly throughout one's life is only possible to the firmest character, the most powerful will.

At last I have brought myself to use these words—a powerful will. And how glad I am to do so in this book. All that I have so far written has been put down with the single aim of leading up to this heretical truth about Chekhov, of demonstrating it so unmistakably that the least thoughtful cannot fail to see that Chekhov's powerful and indomitable will was the core of his personality. It showed itself in every fact of his life, first and foremost, as we have seen, in setting before himself from youth a high standard of moral rectitude and ruthlessly subordinating his behaviour to it. Russia has known many writers who longed to build up their lives according to the dictates of conscience—Gogol, Lev Tolstoi, Nekrasov, Leskov, Gleb Uspensky and Garshin, to name a few—and we admire their aspirations towards what is “right”, what is true, but this moral achievement was sometimes too much for them, even they sometimes broke down and collapsed. Chekhov, it seems, never weakened. His conscience only had to impose on him this or that austere task, and it was fulfilled whatever the cost to himself.

“I despise laziness just as I despise weakness and spiritual languor,” he said of himself. And we have seen the proof of this, for in the end of the eighties, as soon as he came to the conclusion that his literary activities were unnecessary for Russia, he broke them off abruptly, just when they had brought him fame and the solid practical advantages of which he stood so sorely in need.

“I am going—that is irrevocably settled,” he wrote to Pleshcheyev on the eve of his journey to Sakhalin, for all his decisions were invariably of an irrevocable nature. “For him to decide was to act,” Ignaty Potapenko testifies. A will of iron was needed, after the intolerable miseries of the journey across

the roadless wastes of Siberia, not to turn back at, say, Tomsk but to continue the 11,000 versts to the bitter end.

But this powerful will showed itself most of all in Chekhov's writings. What force of character was revealed by the magnificent independence of all his tastes and opinions and by his courageous scorn for the contemporary intellectualist hide-bound ideals and slogans, a contempt that so repelled the coteries of liberal critics, who categorically demanded that his free creative work should be cramped within their own narrow canons. It must have required spiritual force of no mean order to unfurl amidst the intolerant narrow-minded individuals calling themselves liberals a banner on which was written large:

"My holy of holies is the human body, health, mind, talent, inspiration, love and complete freedom—freedom from violence and lies.... I am neither a liberal nor a conservative, neither a political evolutionist, a monk, nor an 'indifferentist'. I detest lies and violence in all their aspects and I find equally detestable the Synod clerks and the writers Notovich and Gradovsky....\* Hypocrisy, stupidity and violence prevail not only in the homes of merchants and in jails; I find them among scientists, writers and even the young."

However we may appraise this challenge to the period, this revolt against its gods and its canons—and life very soon showed that all that freedom was mere illusion—we shall be forced to admit that incredible courage was required at such a time to insist on one's own conception of freedom. Even if Chekhov was subsequently proved mistaken in many things, this inner freedom of conviction and belief was won by him for all time, and made itself felt till the end of his life, as one of the most attractive features of his personality.

It was discerned in him by Gorky, who wrote to him in amazed admiration: "I think you are the first man I have seen who is free and does not bow to anything."

"You are the only one among us who is utterly free both in spirit and mind," Vladimir Tikhonov wrote to him in the eighties. "We are all hide-bound, and cannot cast off the yoke."

In his reminiscences of Chekhov, Ivan Bunin, too, expressed admiration of his inner freedom, which he considered based on his splendid calm. "It may have been that very quality in him," he wrote, "which, in his youth enabled him to bow to no influence and to begin his work so unassumingly and yet with such courage, without any deals with his conscience."

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\* Liberal publicists.—*Ed.*

It seems to me that there was something more than that calm in this; to have won the greatest freedom possible in so servile a society implied first and foremost remarkable will-power. Indeed in Chekhov both as writer and literary innovator it is exactly this will-power that makes itself felt. What is remarkable is that nowhere, neither in conversation nor in letters, did he ever call himself an innovator. And yet both in fiction and drama he brought about a revolution and fought for the new form created by him no less resolutely than did, let us say, Zola for his. As to the theatre, he would not have had the slightest difficulty in satisfying the accepted standards: he could easily have coped with the dynamism of rapid action, and all the traditional theatrical forms, but he swept them aside and won his right to a style of his own, unmarred by the slightest concessions to public taste.

In the very laconism of his writings in those steel-like constructions which make a short story more dynamic than any novel, in his power over words, in the audacious treatment of his material, can be felt the tensed muscles of a giant.

Always and everywhere to the very end—the unbending, powerful will.

If we knew nothing about Chekhov, if we only knew from his letters how in the last few months of his life, despite the ravages of his terrible disease, he dragged himself again and again to his desk, and between fits of nausea, haemorrhages, violent coughing, and diarrhoea, wrote with a hand as cold and white as marble, at the rate of two lines a day, at long intervals, so that his manuscript lay open on the desk for weeks on end, and he could only look at it from across the room in anguish and weakness, unable to write a single word, and yet finishing his work within the appointed time, and overcoming his lassitude by sheer creative effort—if we had only seen Chekhov in these last months, even then we should have realised that here was a man of heroic will. To have written *The Cherry Orchard* in such conditions was a task no less onerous than his journey to the penal colony, and in neither case did he allow himself to be overcome by difficulties. “Weakness and spiritual languor” were alien to him even on the brink of the grave.

### VIII

But why do I speak so much of this? Is it not obvious to all? Strange to say, it is not! It would need hundreds of pages to quote from the articles and pamphlets about Chekhov in

which he is represented as "weak-willed", "passive", "spineless", "inactive", "anaemic", "inert", "languid", "unforceful", "flabby". The entire body of criticism in the eighties and nineties and in the beginning of the twentieth century unwearingly harps on this.

Even those who knew him personally, e.g., N.M. Yezhov (whom Chekhov, by the way, considered anything but brilliant) saw fit to write of him as of "a man lacking in firmness...", "Like every weak individual, he...". Even the complete edition brought out in 1929 contained a long essay, serving until quite lately as an introduction to the whole of Chekhov's works, in which it was authoritatively stated that both in his life and his writing Chekhov was "weak-willed", "passively sensitive", "highly-impressionable and weak".

This crazy article, which totally ignores the truth, came from the pen of V.M. Friche, a vulgar sociologist, who thus attempted to bolster his wicked falsehood about Chekhov's spinelessness with quotations that were mischievously and unfairly picked and juggled.

This false picture has survived to our days. Even so cautious and, it might seem, reputable a scholar as Professor N.K. Piskunov has stated forthright in his preface to the Korolenko-Chekhov correspondence, that Chekhov was "morbidly listless", and "avoided any intervention in the life about him" (? !), being in this respect the very opposite of Korolenko. If the words "morbidly listless" are to be understood as referring to his weak condition during his illness, then that is the case with all sick people; we have seen with what sustained effort of the will Chekhov fought against his fatal illness. If, however, these words are applied to Chekhov to denote a feature of his make-up, then I advise their immediate rejection, for, I repeat, nothing could be more in howling contradiction with all the facts of his biography.

The epoch in which Chekhov lived is often described as one of universal debility and stagnation among the intellectuals. There is something in this, but it is a part view. There never could have been widespread weakness of will in Russia. We must never forget that it was the eighties which contributed such indomitable personalities as Miklukho-Maklai, Przhevalsky, Alexander Ulyanov\* and—Chekhov.

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\* Miklukho-Maklai—an explorer, studied the life of natives in New Guinea; Przhevalsky—a geographer, led expeditions to remote parts of Central Asia; Alexander Ulyanov—the elder brother of V. I. Lenin, executed in 1887 for participation in an attempt on the life of the tsar Alexander III.—Ed.

I dwell on this at such length because the human will, as the most powerful of all forces, capable of transforming our life almost miraculously and destroying for all time its "leadened baseness", is the central theme of all Chekhov's works, and because the keen knowledge of all the injuries, fractures and sprains of the will which his writings display undoubtedly springs from the fact that he was himself a man of exemplary will-power, who subjected all his desires and actions to his unbending will. This opinion of mine is based on the conviction that we shall understand a great deal better the inner meaning of Chekhov's constantly reappearing theme—the fatal conflicts between the strong-willed and the weak-willed—when we have thoroughly realised that his own biography is imbued with this theme.

This Chekhovian theme of the struggle between man's will and human spinelessness was of particular urgency in the eighties and the nineties of the last century. Chekhov became the most vocal writer of his generation for the very reason that his personal theme was consonant with society's.

Since this theme is closely linked with another of the eighties—that of the individual's right to indifference towards whatever is ugly and cruel in life, I have considered it necessary—before speaking of Chekhov's writings—to show that neither in his personality nor in his practice of life, and his dealings with others was there the least trace of indifference; on the contrary, so intense was his intervention in life that many contemporary writers seem like Oblomovs next to him.

This is why Chekhov is so near, so comprehensible to Soviet readers, to those living in our great and creative epoch. He was a great lover of life, an indefatigable builder, a man of unbending will, one who compelled the earth to produce its blossoms, modest in his greatness, shy in his heroism, rising before us in the full charm of his personality as a forerunner of the million-strong race of Soviet people, who, while reorganising the world they live in for the future happiness of all, are reorganising themselves.

Now that we have done something to remove the vicious half-truths and untruths that have accumulated about his name over the past half-century, we can see anew, as it were, with eyes free of all prejudice, the real stature of this genius of literature.

## LEONID GROSSMAN

Leonid Grossman (1888–1965) was a prominent Soviet scholar and writer, and an expert on the history of Russian and European poetry, literature and theatre. His work treats Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Leskov, Sukhovo-Kobylin, Chekhov, Lev Tolstoi, Tyutchev, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Blok, Voltaire, Stendhal, Balzac, famous Russian actors, and many others.

Leonid Grossman is the author of three novels: *The Notes of d'Archiaque*, *Roulettenburg* and *The Velvet Dictator*. They are biographical narratives set in three different epochs of Russian society, depicting Pushkin, Dostoyevsky and Garshin.

His literary studies, which pose new problems and put forward new points of view and factual material, are distinguished by an elegant, vivid style and lively exposition and are easily accessible to the lay reader. They are read extensively and enjoyed not only by specialists, but also by people very far from scholarly pursuits. Leonid Grossman has helped to enliven literary research as a prose genre that attracts the attention of the broad reading public to problems of literature. *The Romance of Nina Zarechnaya* published in this volume is a fictionalised study bringing alive the background to a masterpiece of world literature, Chekhov's play *The Seagull*.





Lydia Mizinova. Photograph





Vera Komissarzhevskaya. Photograph



Isaak Levitan. By L. Bakst. Lithograph. 1899



# THE ROMANCE OF NINA ZARECHNAYA

## Chapter One

### I

"Here everyone is saying that *The Seagull* is an episode from my life," wrote Lydia Stakhievna Mizinova to Chekhov on November 1, 1896, who was better known in Moscow's artistic circles and in the biographies of her illustrious friend, simply as Lika. The writer's answer to this challenge has not been handed down, however the well-known actor Nikolai Khodotov from the Alexandrinsky Theatre was informed by Chekhov's correspondent that it was she and none other who had been portrayed as Nina, that the model for Trigorin was the then popular novelist Ignati Potapenko and for Konstantin Treplev the dramatist himself.

The background to *The Seagull* is infinitely more complicated than this triangle of prototypes, yet the nucleus of the famous play is indicated here fairly accurately nevertheless. The clash between two writers using different approaches in their search after a new style and the romantic conflict between them over a girl they both love reflect to a certain extent the psychological situation that had taken shape in Chekhov's private life and literary career shortly before these particular characters were created. Yet this love drama in the colourful milieu of writers and actors is transformed in Chekhov's play into a conflict between contemporary aesthetic theories epitomising the contention between leading artistic schools in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. In order to grasp fully the unusual theme of this play from the world of art, which also included, to use the author's expression, "an ample measure of love", it is important to turn to a forgotten romantic episode and scrutinise the character of its leading lady, who was a highly typical representative of a whole generation in the Russian society of that period, when new creative paths had to be

sought in the sombre labyrinth of that turbulent moment in history.

This was a time when the militant aspirations of the *People's Will* had collapsed and the liberal intelligentsia had renounced the principles of the revolutionaries of the sixties. In the memorable trio of 1882, *In Memory of a Great Artist* Tchaikovsky not only mourned the loss of a friend but proclaimed, as it were, the advent of a grim, cheerless era. The great composer's lament at the death of Nikolai Rubinstein presaged the era of coercion and the stifling of free thought and expression that was to descend over Russia. Artists and poets were to have their wings clipped. Indeed a wounded bird was to become a telling symbol for a whole era in Russian art.

This was a time when Alexander III sought by every means at his disposal to implement the slogan of militant reaction, demanding that Russia be "frozen so as not to rot", or in other words that the people be held in fetters so that revolution be made impossible. This goal found practical expression in the government counter-reforms that revoked the "liberties" granted shortly before to Zemstvo and municipal authorities, schools, universities, the courts and the press. Ruthless factory legislation held down the labour movement, and policies implemented in the outlying areas of the empire served to hold back the cultural growth of ethnic minorities.

Yet as Lenin wrote: "There has been no period in the history of Russia to which the expression 'the turn of intellect and reason has come again' could be better applied than the period of Alexander III.... It was in that period that Russian revolutionary thought worked hardest...."

A similar upsurge was to be noted in the artistic life of Russia. The creative artists who had started to make names for themselves in that grim era, those who had been born in the "dead years", at times succeeded in overcoming the pressures of the time and discovering suitable paths for the embodiment of their bold ideas. Their number included such great masters of literature, drama, painting and music as Chekhov, Gorky, Stanislavsky, Levitan, Vrubel, Serov, Rakhmaninov, Skryabin, Chaliapin, Blok, Komissarzhevskaya and Kachalov.

These were, however, merely the chosen few. They were surrounded by gifted followers anxious to keep in step with the leading trend of the time, but who in no way determined the shape of things to come. In their wake came a nameless mass of dilettanti, failures, would-be geniuses and aimless dreamers. They were drawn towards the cherished world of ideas and



giving any assistance to his abandoned family. Indeed he chose to disappear beyond its reach altogether.

Deserted by her husband, Lydia Yurgeneva displayed remarkable resilience and undaunted energy. Completely on her own and with no capital or savings to fall back on she succeeded in bringing up and educating her daughter, who at an early age was to know the hardships of a fatherless childhood.

In addition to her work at the Moscow Orphan's Institute Lydia Yurgeneva gave private lessons and for a number of years taught the piano at Moscow's Elizabeth High School where she won her pupils' love and respect. She was a pianist above the common run, and long before Richard Wagner had been acclaimed in Russia she was studying his works most assiduously: her memories of her daughter's childhood were always linked with the leitmotifs from *Tannhäuser* (a fact of which her daughter reminds her in a letter written from Paris in June 1895).

The fatherless Lika was taken care of and cherished by her close female relatives. Apart from her mother, she was always treated like a daughter by her aunt Serafima Panafidina who lived with her family on their estate of Pokrovskoye near Tver. One of the other part-owners of this estate was Sofia Johanson, an unmarried cousin of the Yurgenev sisters, who was to assume the role of grandmother for Lida. In the childhood letters which young Lika Mizinova wrote to "Granny Sonya" we already find a spirited "chatter-box" who by the end of the seventies had made marked progress in German, French and her piano lessons.

Originally it had been planned to have Lika educated at the Institute for Young Ladies of Gentle Birth, but the family's financial straits compelled her relatives to make do with an ordinary high school. In 1889 Lika completed her school education with flying colours and then started work as a teacher. One of the close friends of the family was a certain L. F. Rzhetskaya in charge of a well-known Moscow high-school for girls, who offered this young girl in straitened circumstances a position as teacher of Russian in the junior classes of her school. In September 1889 Lydia Mizinova started working there.

Next to the classroom where Lydia gave her first lessons another young woman used to teach history and geography: it was Maria Chekhova, sister of the author of the story *The Steppe* and the play *Ivanov*, who had just been awarded the Pushkin Prize by the Academy of Sciences for his collection of stories entitled *In the Twilight*.

The girls soon became friends and in the autumn of 1889 Lydia Mizinova started to visit Maria's home: after the Chekhov family acquired the estate of Melikhovo she became a constant visitor and was admitted to the circle of the family's closest friends. The accomplished pianist and budding singer, remarkable for her gay and witty conversation and delicate beauty Lika soon captivated the whole family from the venerable head of the family, Pavel Egorovich, to the student Mikhail.

I shall not cite the almost hackneyed comparison of Lika's resemblance to the Swan Princess from the Russian fairy-tale once made by Tatyana Shchepkina-Kupernik. In actual fact Lika was a typical educated Russian girl of the eighties. Her face was an expressive oval enclosed in thick golden hair; beneath the clearly defined dark brows were lively, intelligent blue eyes which sometimes had an air of sadness about them, that the next moment would give way to a look of animated irony or a sparkle of bold challenge. These were the chiselled features which produced an immediate impact with their originality and polished perfection. Victor Bilbin, secretary of the humoristic journal *Oskolki* (Shards) wrote after a visit to Melikhovo that he had seen at Chekhov's house a "girl of remarkable beauty". Friends used to stop Chekhov's sister Maria to ask her who the young beauty was.

Portraits that have been handed down to us bear out this impression. Then again Lika's uninhibited, gay and pithy conversation enlivened her enchanting features to a rare degree. It is hardly surprising that outstanding artists of the period were soon to number among the friends of "the fair Lika", as she was known in the Chekhov family. This testifies not merely to her attractive appearance but also to her wide range of talents.

Chekhov's friendship with Lika was to leave its mark on the rest of her life. The writer's sister aptly notes the complex nature of the relationship that grew up between them, and all in all provides an accurate interpretation of her friend's love which brought her so much pain. Lydia Mizinova was in her words, "deeply infatuated with my brother. There is no doubt that Anton in his turn also was deeply attached to her. Yet there were certain traits in Lika's character that were alien to my brother. Hers was not a strong or disciplined character. As was to emerge from some of the letters Lika wrote to him which were published twenty years ago she was deeply in love with Anton while his feelings for her were very different. He clearly strove to contain his love for Lika, for he realised that marriage to her would not bring him the vital peace and stability essential



for his creative work. Lika's serious letters were usually answered with rather ordinary jokes that caused her so much pain."

Chekhov's sister and Lydia Mizinova's friend is naturally the most authoritative of witnesses and was in an ideal position to assess their relationship. The conclusion she draws is by and large incontestable. Yet this short resumé fails to make it clear why Chekhov did not reciprocate Lika's love and even went out of his way to contain his feelings for her. Now that the whole correspondence between Chekhov and Lidia Mizinova, her letters to Maria and the letters and memoirs of their friends, is accessible, we can glean a fairly complete picture of this involved relationship which lies behind the creation of one of the masterpieces of Russian drama.

### III

There are various accounts of Lika's first visit to Doctor Korneyev's house on Sadovaya-Kudrinskaya Street, where the Chekhov family was living at the time. The one that would appear to be the most reliable is that of Chekhov's brother Mikhail.

On her return from school one day Maria announced to her brothers: "You just wait a little and I shall bring a pretty girl to show you." Then Mikhail Chekhov goes on to relate: "Indeed she soon brought to the house 'fair Lika', a shy somewhat bewildered girl of eighteen, who seemed to feel rather awkward when we immediately all gathered round her. But everything turned out very well, we started making jokes and soon all took a liking to her: it was strange somehow to think that she too was a school teacher, albeit a very new one. It seemed impossible to imagine that any of her pupils did as they were told. We thought that would be the end of the acquaintance, but then she came again. We were all living upstairs then and when we heard her ring at the door, we all rushed out onto the staircase and stared down waiting for her. She was taken aback by it all and in her embarrassment she hid her face in the coats hanging in the hall."

All this took place in October 1889. A good friend of Chekhov's the actress Cleopatra Karatygina refers in a letter of November 1st to "Lika's debut" which must obviously be a reference to Lydia Mizinova's first visit to the Chekhov household which took place shortly before.

The first period in the relationship between Chekhov and Lydia Mizinova is that between the autumn of 1889 and the spring of 1890. Little is known about it, yet there do exist a few references which would point to mutual interest of the new acquaintances. In those six months Chekhov presented Lika with copies of his new books complete with light-hearted dedications that would point to a happy friendly relationship. This is borne out further by her work in collecting together the necessary material for Chekhov as he set about writing on his trip to Sakhalin. Together with the writer's sister, Lika used to work in the Rumyantsev Museum taking notes from geographical and ethnographical literature and from prison reports. Chekhov's book on the prisons of the tsarist régime thus owes something to Lika's technical assistance.

Much later in 1898 Lydia sent Chekhov from Paris her portrait quoting on the back the following lines from one of Tchaikovsky's romances set to the words of Apukhtin:

Whether my days will pass darkly, serenely,  
 Whether soon, my life squandered, I vanish from view,  
 One thing is certain, beyond all repealing:  
 Till death all my plans, songs, and forces, and feeling  
 All, all are for you....

To these lines she added: "I could have written that eight years ago, I write it today and shall repeat it ten years from now." This provides us with a definite indication of the moment when Lydia Mizinova's love for Chekhov was born, namely the year 1890.

The winter and spring of that year was the time when the young girl fell in love with the charming man and great writer whom she referred to in one of her letters with her customary directness as "my demi-god".

Chekhov at that time was still a young man; in the autumn of 1889 he was only twenty-nine. His hair was thick and kept tumbling over his forehead; he had a thin growth of downy hair round his lips that always wore the hint of a smile, and he did not yet wear a pince-nez. His open gaze had a youthful, friendly air about it and only the slightest touch of irony. The collar of his unstarched shirt sported no tie but a student cord. This holder of the Academy's Pushkin Prize was already producing serious works of literature, yet there was still something of the carefree journalist about his appearance.

The young writer's trip to the island of Sakhalin led to a long interruption of the friendship that had been growing up

between him and Lika. Before setting off on his long journey Chekhov presented his new friend with a photograph with the following dedication: "To the kindest of creatures from whom I am now running away to Sakhalin." This may appear to be just a jocular phrase but it definitely contained a kernel of truth. Chekhov really was trying to put a clamp down on the part friendly, part amorous relationship that had been taking shape, so as not to tie himself down in marriage. "I do not wish to marry, nor do I have anyone in mind," he wrote to Suvorin on October 18, 1892. "Not that I regret it. I should find it boring to be burdened with a wife. But I should have no objections to falling in love. Life is dull without heady emotional excitement." Yet Chekhov was unable to summon up such emotions at will. He went out of his way to prolong the separation from the girl who had fallen in love with him. His journey to Sakhalin lasted eight months. It was not till December 8th that Chekhov came back to Moscow only to spend the whole of January in St. Petersburg and soon afterwards to make another journey, this time to Italy and France, which lasted from March 11th to May 2nd. The day after returning from Europe he left for a dacha in the small town of Aleksin on the River Oka and from there went on to the old estate of Bogimovo. All this toing and froing looks very much like a desperate attempt to run away from love.

#### IV

Chekhov's letters to Lydia Mizinova are full of jokes, witticisms, light-hearted jest and comic nicknames, all of which came so readily to the young writer. Sometimes his correspondent attempts to employ a similar tone which lends her letters the air of a lively, uninhibited conversation.

Yet "conversation" of this sort had definite undercurrents. One of the participants in that conversation was obviously deeply involved with the other, and the victim of a serious, sad love fated to be misunderstood and unrequited. The emotional drama Lika was going through can sometimes be contained no longer and breaks through to the surface of her letters.

Later Lika resorts to an old and familiar manoeuvre, an attempt to arouse Chekhov's jealousy. The first name she uses to this end is that of Levitan\* who is mentioned fairly

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\* Isaac Levitan (1860-1900)—famous Russian landscape painter and a friend of Chekhov's.—*Ed.*

frequently in her letters. "I have just returned from a visit to your family," Lika informs Chekhov in a letter of January 13, 1891. "I was escorted home by Levitan...."

"Sofia Petrovna is being terribly kind," she writes in another letter, "and keeps inviting me over, while Levitan is gloomy and sombre; I often recall how you used to call him the Moor."

The artist Sofia Kuvshinnikova was the wife of a local doctor, who had established in the modest apartment that went with her husband's position, a well-known artists' "salon" of which a satirical description is to be found in Chekhov's story *The Grasshopper*.

She was a talented woman of strikingly unusual appearance with the dark complexion of a mulatto. She was a pupil of Levitan's and has left posterity interesting reminiscences of the expeditions they made together to Zvenigorod, Plyos, and Vladimir and Tver Provinces to make sketches, which provided material for such famous pictures as *Evening Bells*, *By the Pool*, *Eternal Rest*, and *Vladimirka Highway*.

Lydia Mizinova was brought along to Sofia Kuvshinnikova's literary gatherings by the artists and musicians in her circle of friends. This was her introduction to the world of art which captivated her for life. It was here that Lida was introduced to Levitan who was the guiding hand for the artistic enterprises of the "salon's" hostess.

The young pianist's encounter with Levitan took place at the very end of the eighties, when he had made a name for himself and had evolved the luminescent tone of his landscapes with their sparkling stretches of water and invigorating tone. When Chekhov was shown Levitan's Volga paintings in 1888 he commented: "A smile has come into your pictures...."

The friendship between Levitan and Lydia Mizinova was a bright episode in their lives. The artist was about thirty at the time. His virile handsomeness of an Arab type was described a few years later by his friend Nesterov who was received by Levitan "in a luxurious gold and red robe from Bukhara and a white turban, a perfect model for Veronese's *The Marriage at Cana*".

In the late eighties and early nineties this talented artist was at the height of his creative and physical prime: his was an impulsive, passionate, amorous nature and he was given to wild romances of which he made no secret from the public. This applied to his infatuation with Lydia Mizinova as we are told by Chekhov's brother Mikhail.

In May 1891 Levitan and Kuvshinnikova went to stay in the small town of Zatishye in Tver Province near the country estate of Lika's uncle, Panafidin, to work on new landscapes in this enchanting corner of north-west Russia with its still lakes and ponds, flowering guelder roses and honeysuckle bathed in the light of a gentle misty sun shedding a pale lustre over the thick cascade of trembling birch leaves and weeping willows. The shady thickets, gleaming pools, pearly clouds, curtains of thick foliage setting off the delicate silhouettes of a bell tower in the blue twilight of distant copses are forever associated in our minds with Levitan's landscapes. It is hardly surprising that this particular summer was marked by the creation of many sketches for subsequent famous paintings by this subtle master who immortalised the Russian countryside.

One of these sketches was a study for the remarkable picture *Autumn* which Levitan was to complete in 1892 and which he made a present of to Lydia Mizinova. It shows a lawn covered with a carpet of thick grass starting to turn yellow. The branches of the trees around the lawn are almost bare except for isolated clusters alight with the crimson and gold of autumn. The very colour scheme of the picture reflects the grey eyes and ash-blond hair of the young girl the artist was in love with at the time.

Was Lika in love with him too? There is no doubt that Levitan corresponded to her conception of the heroic type: she could not help but be impressed by the combination of his fame and manly beauty. Yet her heart already belonged to another great artist: "You know, if Levitan was a little like you, I should have invited him over for supper," she writes to Chekhov in a letter of January 13, 1891.

Deep-lying sadness shows through these jocular words. In answer to Chekhov's question as to whether she was dreaming of Levitan's "black eyes filled with African passion" Lika wrote in a serious, troubled letter of July 2nd: "Why do you keep referring to Levitan and my 'dreams'? I am not dreaming of anyone and have no need of anyone or wish to be with anyone...." However, Lydia's friendship with Levitan remains one of the poetic episodes of her life. Chekhov was to remember it. An indirect allusion to this friendship is the "enchanted lake" in the drama of the seagull-heroine.

## V

This brief interlude Lika planned to follow with a journey that was to have proved a turning-point in her life. In the summer of 1892 she took a bold decision. She contemplated a long journey with Chekhov through the Crimea and the Caucasus. Their route was worked out in detail: Moscow-Sebastopol-Batumi-Tiflis-the Georgian Military Highway-Vladikavkaz-Mineralnye Vody and back to Moscow. Lika announced to her family that she was planning a trip to the south with a lady friend and ordered tickets to the Caucasus for the beginning of August and in separate compartments (probably to avoid gossip of any kind).

However, Chekhov showed little enthusiasm for this plan. Again he kept putting off decisions and evading the issue. On hearing tickets had been ordered he cancelled the trip altogether. "These eternal excuses!" wrote Lydia Mizinova in reply to this piece of news on June 26, 1892, in tones of angry disappointment. "There never seems to have been an occasion when something did not prevent you from writing me a decent letter! I've already written to cancel the tickets so you need not worry on that count..." The blow to her pride is quite clear, and indeed it was to be the source of hard feelings for a long time.

On July 20, 1892, a deeply insulted Lydia writes to Chekhov: "So, you are going to the Crimea after all! That is what you see as noble behaviour, I suppose! To make me drop the idea and then to set off on your own..."

All this points to a deep misunderstanding between these two, that can be put down to their fundamentally incompatible natures, outlooks on life and goals to which they aspired. The enamoured young girl longed for happiness, which the writer was ready to renounce for the sake of his creative writing. Nor did he ever conceal this fact from his friend: "Alas, I am already an old young man," he wrote to her on March 27, 1892. "My love is no sun and can conjure forth no spring either for me or for the creature I love." What kind of love was this? Would it not be more apt to term it friendly sympathy or attachment? Indeed there was little of sun or spring in their relationship. Nor was there happiness. On the one hand there was the "bewitching golden-haired damsel", as Chekhov referred to her in 1890, and on the other a writer completely absorbed in his creative writing and anxious to avoid the dangers of life's bewitching temptations. Many painters and

writers wholly engrossed in their art have experienced similar dilemmas in their private lives.

The freedom of Lika's life and her Bohemian pursuit of all kinds of diversions and entertainment was alien to Chekhov, just as her colourful succession of friends and acquaintances. He pointed this out to her quite frankly on occasions (see Lydia's letter to Maria Chekhova written in Pokrovskoye on July 18, 1893, where she writes: "In Moscow I visited all my lovers—excuse the turn of phrase, but it was your brother who coined it.")

Chekhov was clearly attracted by his friend's sensitive appreciation of literature and art, and by her musical talents. Indeed, Lika's piano-playing and singing were even to leave their mark on his work. Her singing is clearly reflected in the stories *The Black Monk* and *My Life*, and her girlish dreams of the stage are immortalised in *The Seagull*. Yet at the same time Chekhov was aware of the limitations of Lika's musical gifts and never regarded her as a true virtuoso.

Lydia Mizinova sincerely aspired to an artistic career and was a true lover of music. Yet she had no real vocation for it. The heroine in Chekhov's story *Ionych*, Ekaterina Turkina became aware of her mistake too late: "I was a strange being then and thought of myself as a great pianist. Nowadays all young ladies play the piano, and I just followed suit. Yet there was nothing special about me; I am no more of a pianist than my mother is a writer." It was equally late, indeed not before 1902, that Lydia Mizinova after fifteen years of restless searching was to realise her mistake: that she was not born to be an actress, singer or musical virtuoso and that no amount of effort could ever make her any of these. However, it was only after a long series of mistakes and fiascos that she was at last to be convinced of this.

On March 25, 1890, Chekhov presented his friend with a copy of his latest work *A Dreary Story*. Side by side with the story of the moral decline of a famous professor losing hold of his "guiding principle" in the oppressive atmosphere of those years of reaction, Chekhov unfolds the drama of a Russian girl of the eighties passionately infatuated with the magical world of the theatre, yet not endowed with sufficient talent to devote her life to it. The heroine, who was a pupil of this scholar of international stature, becomes an actress in the provincial theatre, where she falls in love with the leading man. She is soon profoundly disillusioned by her experience of the acting world, makes a suicide attempt, loses her child and then slowly goes

downhill, bereft of any faith in her vocation and at a loss to find any other path in life. In many respects Chekhov here anticipates the future that was in store for Lika, whose character finds artistic expression in this work.

One of the first failures lying in wait for Lydia Mizinova in the world of the theatre occurred as early as the spring of 1890. Her grandmother writes that twenty-year-old Lika was dreaming of taking up the stage as a career. In Sofia Mikhailovna's view this was bound to bring disaster her way. This conviction prompted the former pupil of the Smolny Institute for Young Ladies of Gentle Birth to welcome the failure of her "grand-daughter's" first test of her acting gifts. It was in the Pushkin Theatre\* where Lydia was given a part in Gnedich's *Burning Letters*, but did not reveal the "slightest trace of talent". The path to the footlights after this was closed to Lika and, to all intents and purposes, for ever.

Chekhov had little sympathy for this kind of dilettantism. In his appreciation of the arts Chekhov attributed great significance to work—"enormous, strenuous work" which he was to discern as early as 1881 in the art of Sarah Bernhardt when he recommended to Russian actors that they "learn what work is from our visitor". On July 27, 1892, he wrote to Lydia Mizinova: "You have not the slightest inclination for regular work.... That is why you girls are all fit for nothing but giving sixpenny lessons and learning all manner of folly from Fedotov."

Alexander Fedotov was a well-known personality in the theatrical world of Moscow, who in 1888 together with Konstantin Stanislavsky and Fyodor Komissarzhevsky founded the *Art and Literature Association*, to which were affiliated a drama and operatic school. It was here that Lydia Mizinova embarked on her studies. She did not dispute Chekhov's criticism, but placed the spontaneous life of the emotions on a par with art, setting the greatest store of all by that love which gains complete sway over a woman's heart. From this standpoint Lydia Mizinova reproached her correspondent with a lack of sensitivity and defended her position: "As far as my lack of a feeling for proper work is concerned you are to some extent

\* This was the first private theatre in Moscow founded by A. Brenko, an actress from the Maly Theatre, in 1880, which closed down in 1882. Some members of the original troupe later joined the theatre reopened under Fyodor Korsh, which Sofia Johanson referred to as the Pushkin Theatre out of habit.—*Auth.*



right. I find it difficult to work properly at everything, and once I turn my hand to one particular thing I become interested and preoccupied with that one particular thing, and I, naturally enough, push everything else into the background. I am unable to approach everything and everyone with an equal degree of interest as you can. It is a serious weakness perhaps, nevertheless I still prefer to be what I am; at least something is dear to me, while you can never commit yourself to anything...."

This subtle veiled polemic touches on the most important thing of all—the very meaning of life, human relationships, and the significance not only of art but also of love in man's search for that meaning, the significance of these two elements which in the life of an artist are inseparably linked together. The central motif of Chekhov's *Seagull* is thus already taking shape between the lines of this correspondence.

Lydia Mizinova, like Nina Zarechnaya, finds it difficult to put her emotions into words. The latter uses a quotation from one of the works of her idol, the writer Trigorin, while the other leaves the man she loves absolute freedom in his decisions.

"Well, so the time has come to say farewell," writes Lika, "and do not forget her who is constantly thinking of you (a beautiful phrase, isn't it!? But I am afraid it will alarm you and so I hasten to add that it was written half in jest). Where truth ends and jest starts I do not really know myself."

## Chapter Two

### I

On August 13, 1893, Chekhov told Lydia Mizinova that new visitors had come to Melikhovo. "Potapenko and Sergeyenko came to see us. Potapenko made a favourable impression. He sings very pleasantly."

Pyotr Sergeyenko was a friend of Chekhov's from his schooldays in Taganrog; it was he who had published the first review of Chekhov's work in one of the Odessa newspapers. When Chekhov's favourite brother Nikolai, a wonderful person and gifted painter, died in Sumi in the year 1889, Sergeyenko together with the actor Alexander Lensky invited the writer to Odessa where the Maly Theatre was on tour.

Chekhov arrived in Odessa on July 5th and spent ten days there. His friends' plan was to prove successful. Walks along the

plane-lined boulevards and down by the harbour, bathing, sailing across the sparkling water under the midday sun, visits to wine cellars with abundant supplies of fruit and Eastern sweetmeats, dinners at the Hotel du Nord or, on occasions, in the cheap Italian cafés on the outskirts of the city, drinks at Auerbach's tavern, midday ice-creams at Zambrini's all rounded off with evening performances of the visiting Maly Theatre, whose repertoire included *Hamlet*, *Don Juan*, *Tartuffe*, *Wit Works Woe*, *Talents and Admirers* and a number of gay modern comedies, after which the assembled company would move on to the rooms of Kleopatra Karatygina, where the visiting actors assembled at midnight for late parties referred to in jest as "Antony and Cleopatra's parties", all helped to distract Chekhov's thoughts from the personal sorrow he had just experienced.

The journalist Sergeyenko was anxious to introduce Chekhov to the Odessa literary world and even took him to the dacha of a young journalist on the staff of the *Novorossiisk Telegraph*, Ignati Potapenko, who had already made a name for himself in the capital on the strength of his story *Sacred Art*. However, after the gay company of the actors and actresses from Moscow this provincial writer struck Chekhov as tedious.

Yet Potapenko's biography was definitely somewhat out of the ordinary. He was the son of a Ukrainian peasant woman and a dazzling officer from the Uhlans who had abandoned his career in the cavalry at the prime of life to take orders as a village priest. His son was sent to be educated at the Kherson church school from where he went on the Odessa seminary, clearly expected to follow in his father's footsteps. However, the young seminarist became passionately interested in literature and music and soon afterwards entered the new University of South Russia. Dreaming of an operatic career, he then set off for St. Petersburg, where he studied singing and the violin at the conservatoire. On his return to Odessa Potapenko began to collaborate on various local newspapers and in 1881 he published his first literary work in the journal *Vestnik Evropy*.

In the early nineties Potapenko won wide popularity with his stories such as *On Active Service*, *The General's Daughter*, *Cursed Glory*. The Academy of Sciences awarded him and another writer a Pushkin Prize to be shared between them and the critics hailed his "lively talent" and proclaimed him one of the "idols of the nineties". Yet this lightning success rapidly faded and soon enough Potapenko came to occupy his rightful place, that of an entertaining and prolific writer on social

themes, whose writings lacked profound ideas or distinctive style.

At the time when Potapenko moved to Moscow in 1893 he was at the summit of his fame. As Mikhail Chekhov was so aptly to observe: "At that time Potapenko was enjoying the best days of his life. He used to sing, play the violin, make jokes, and time spent with him was always gay. He captured the attention of all around him thanks to his high spirits and animated, emotional nature." "Women thought the world of him," wrote Nemirovich-Danchenko in his memoirs, "because he thought the world of them, and—most important of all—he knew how to please them."

This was to be borne out within Chekhov's circle of friends where Potapenko was soon to be constantly in attendance.

## II

"Lika and I have become great friends with Ignati Nikolayevich," Maria Chekhova was to recall. "We started to call ourselves his sisters and to use the intimate form of address. He was touchingly frank in his behaviour towards us. And as so often happens in this life, one of the 'sisters' started to fall for Potapenko. It is quite possible that initially Lika simply wanted to *forget things and shake herself free from the painful unrequited love she felt for Anton Pavlovich*. Yet Potapenko had a family, a wife and two daughters...." This was the prelude to the ensuing drama.

For a while the developing relationship flourished in a poetic atmosphere. Potapenko used to perform dazzling arias and play the violin (he was later to write an operetta based on Gogol's *Inspector General*). Lydia Mizinova would accompany him on the piano and sometimes she too could be persuaded to sing. Ever since the beginning of the nineties she had dreamt of an operatic career and had already started studying singing.

Tchaikovsky's romances were an essential item on the programmes of all the concerts at Melikhovo. The lyrical songs of the great composer have an impact far beyond his own subjective moods. His elegies have much in common with his epic and philosophical creations, from the passionate sighs of *Romeo and Juliet* to the mournful melodies of the *Pathétique*. In this miniature genre the composer's "personal themes" are perceived first and foremost as revelations of man's inner world

as he persists in his struggle to achieve happiness and for the right to live a full life and breathe freely.

Tchaikovsky's musings on passion and grief were close to Chekhov's heart while the themes of the struggle for happiness and emotional liberation echoed the aspirations which had been haunting Lydia Mizinova for years. This explains why she quoted one of the verses from Tchaikovsky's romance set to the words of Apukhtin's *Whether by Daylight...* as a dedication on her portrait which she presented to Chekhov. She wrote out the tragic second verse ("Whether soon, my life squandered, I vanish from view...."), but of course at concerts Lika would have sung the whole romance complete with the triumphant introduction:

Whether by daylight or in the night's stillness,  
While easily dreaming, or waking anew,  
Eternally filling the whole of existence  
The same thought pursues me, doom-laden, persistent,  
Always of you.

"After the delicate water-colours of the early romances," comments a contemporary music critic, "this joyous hymn to triumphant love is sparkling with liberated passion, restraint is thrown to the winds. Its melody has absorbed, as it were, the life-giving warmth, and light, and sun. It soars in the air like a bird intoxicated with sparkling prospects of freedom."

At the time when this and other great Russian romances were being performed at Melikhovo every night, the news of Tchaikovsky's death broke upon the household.

A mere two months before Tchaikovsky had completed his *Sixth Symphony*, the *Pathétique*. He conducted it in St. Petersburg on October 16th, nine days before his death. One of the world's supreme orchestral poems was to prove a failure at its first performance. At the reception given by Rimsky-Korsakov after the concert the composer met with deferential rather than ecstatic response. Although sorely disappointed, he wrote in one of his last letters with the confidence of a great master that he had not written and would not write anything better. Posterity was to rank this work with Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*.

Chekhov at once sent a telegram to the composer's brother Modest. "Terrible desolation. I deeply respected and loved Pyotr Ilyich and owe him a great deal. I feel for you from the bottom of my heart." In Russian art the names of Chekhov and Tchaikovsky will always be linked on account of the lyrical style they had in common and also because of their unswerving friendship.

Another musician-friend of Chekhov's, Rakhmaninov who had written a *Phantasia* on the theme of Chekhov's story *On the Road* and was later to compose a romance to the words of Sonya's final monologue in the play *Uncle Vanya*, honoured the memory of Tchaikovsky with an elegiac trio entitled *Death of a Great Artist*.

### III

Losing faith in her love for Chekhov ever being requited Lydia Mizinova at last resolved to make a break with him. In the autumn of 1893 she started preparing for a trip to Paris to study singing in earnest under Europe's finest vocalists. One of her friends also well-known to Chekhov's entourage, a certain Varvara Eberlet was to accompany her. Their departure was set for that winter or early spring.

On October 8, 1893, Lydia sent to Chekhov the following *cri de cœur*: "You of course do not and cannot know what it means to want something no end, and yet be unable have it—you have not experienced it!

"At the moment I am in this very state. I long so much to see you, the longing is so deep—and yet I know that I shall get no further than longing. Perhaps it is foolish and even indecent to write that but since you know all this anyway, you will not condemn me for it. I need to know—do understand—need to know whether or not you are coming and if so, when. One way or the other I must know. There are only three or four months left when I can see you and after that perhaps never again.

"I beg you to write me a line or two, since you are bound not to come.... Don't be angry. *L. Mizinova*."

On October 10th Chekhov replied with a kind, reassuring letter: "What's all this melodrama, Lika? We shall be seeing each other not for three or four months as you write, but for 44 years since I will be following in your tracks or shall simply stop you going." In other words he promised an imminent meeting.

In Lika's next letter to Chekhov, dated November 2, 1893 the dramatic references to their impending separation border on despair. "My most ardent desire is to cure myself of this terrible condition in which I find myself, but it is so difficult to do it alone—I beg you to help me—do not invite me to the house, do not see me! For you it makes little difference, while it might perhaps help me to forget you. I cannot leave before December or January—otherwise I should have done so at once! In

Moscow it is easy to avoid seeing each other, and I shall simply not come to Melikhovo—what does it matter to me what people may think, and indeed what they must have been thinking for a long time. Forgive me that I make you read all this nonsense but, believe me, my heart is so heavy. I am making the most of a moment when I have the strength to write all this, otherwise I shall fail yet again to pluck up the necessary courage. You are not going to laugh over this letter, are you? That would be too much! ... You can be sure that these thoughts are serious and what I am asking you to do is the only solution I can see, and I beg you to weigh it up seriously and help me. Farewell ... *Lydia Mizinova.*”

This new tone of intolerable suffering can be explained by the abrupt change that had taken place in Chekhov's private life. Lika realises that there is no point in struggling on in her pursuit of happiness at Chekhov's side.

In the autumn of 1893 a new actress joined F.A. Korsh's troupe—Lydia Yavorskaya.

Shchepkina-Kupernik's account of the appearance of this unknown young woman, who had never set foot on the stage, at the house of an eminent theatrical entrepreneur demanding as a debut the leading role in *La dame aux camélias* is an ill-founded legend. She was already a professional actress at the time, albeit of little experience.

Korsh agreed to let the provincial leading lady show her paces in a light comedy. In the space of two or three weeks she became first actress in his troupe.

It was not long before Yavorskaya met Chekhov and became a friend of his. This event was to have a marked influence on his life and writing. Of interest in this connection is a little known reminiscence of the actress herself: “I have a whole host of memories of Anton Pavlovich. We were on very friendly terms when I was working for Korsh in Moscow.... In those days we had our own close-knit circle.

“On frequent occasions he would express his dissatisfaction with the modern theatre: ‘Why do we have to bring on to the stage fools or people who think they are clever, why do we have to conjure up scenes which produce either tears or laughter? Why not give pictures of ordinary life which would not arouse tears or laughter, but would give people food for thought, make them analyse situations taken from everyday life? Why do we have to concentrate on one particular passion or emotion in a

hero instead of simply presenting on the stage an intelligent individual subject, in one degree or another, with all feelings and emotions?" "

In the autumn of 1893 Chekhov informed Yavorskaya of his intention to write a play for her. Yavorskaya later reminded him of this promise in a letter dated February 2, 1894: "I hope you remember the promise you made to write at least a one-act play for me. You told me the subject for it and I found it so fascinating that I am still enthralled by it. For some reason I decided that the play will be called *Day-dreams* echoing the final word spoken by the countess: 'Dream!' "

This, of course, is how the second act of *The Seagull* ends. Nina Zarechnaya carried away by her conversation with Trigorin and completely engrossed in her ecstatic thoughts, walks up alone to the footlights and after a meaningful pause utters the single word: "Dream!" This meant that Chekhov had been contemplating this unusual curtain three years before he actually wrote *The Seagull*.

Chekhov's attachment to Lydia Yavorskaya was a complex one, as we are told by Tatyana Shchepkina-Kupernik in the most authoritative account that exists of their relationship: "There is no doubt that she attracted him and interested him as a woman, yet for some reason irritated him as well...."

In one of the letters Yavorskaya sent to Melikhovo we find the following detail: "Lydia Mizinova is with me at the moment...."

Lika was obviously quick to learn of Chekhov's infatuation with Korsh's new leading lady and anxiously followed the progress of their growing intimacy.

There was nothing for it now: the break had to come. In December Lydia Mizinova decided once and for all that she would abandon the hopeless struggle against Yavorskaya and seek consolation in an affair with her musical partner Potapenko.

Of Potapenko's attachment to Lydia we can find evidence in his letter to Chekhov of January 8, 1894, when he invites his friend from Melikhovo to Moscow for January 12th when some friends are planning to pool resources for a small banquet. "We hope Maria and Lydia will be there. The latter is not here at the moment which explains why I am pining away, for I am head over heels in love with her."

A similar note is struck in a February letter to Chekhov: "I am in a desolate frame of mind for I am in love with Lydia and getting nowhere." Yet it would appear that this period was the

happiest in all the time Potapenko and Lydia were to spend together. Lydia was to write later that their happiness lasted for a mere three months. This means most likely December 1893 and January and February 1894. This interlude was to leave its mark on Lika's fate for a long time to come. She made a break with Chekhov at last and let herself succumb to Potapenko's charms. One man continued to hesitate, fending off serious discussions with jokes and avoiding any decisive step, while the other offered and promised her everything: to leave his family and make her happy for the rest of her life.

A single word from Chekhov would have been enough to hold back his friend and save her from the disaster that was closing in upon her. A year later she was to reproach him bitterly for his indifference to her at that turning-point in her life.

Much later Potapenko was to put Chekhov's standpoint at that all-important moment down to his sober restraint and level-headed caution, which, in their turn, could be explained by his "talent which demanded infinite exertion from him and resented any other of life's claims upon him".

This explanation may be valid, for all we know, but Chekhov himself obviously came to regret his "caution", as can be seen from the words, tragic in their stark brevity, which he wrote to Lydia Mizinova, whose illusion of happiness had by that time been completely shattered: "I'm not very well, I'm coughing almost incessantly. It would appear I have let my health slip through my fingers just as I did you." (September 18, 1894.)

In the many volumes of Chekhov's correspondence there are no lines more desolate than these. They are all the sadder in that they confront us not merely with a tragedy meted out to Chekhov by fate, but a tragedy of his own making.

#### IV

To return to Lika's story, on March 5, 1894, Potapenko left Moscow for Paris and a week later Lika set off for the same destination from St. Petersburg. They had planned to live together abroad but nothing was to come of this for Potapenko was already installed in Paris with his wife and children. Soon afterwards Lydia was to write to Chekhov's sister: "The day before yesterday I sent Ignati a letter poste restante as we had agreed and today he came to see me but stayed for a mere



half-hour. He came at half-past ten and left at eleven. He looks very under the weather and apparently is not allowed out on his own. He even brought with him all your and my letters and my portrait, so things look bad for poor Ignati. In five days' time they are all leaving for Italy. He said that he had found his wife seriously ill when he arrived and thinks it must be consumption, but I think he is merely inventing things again!

"Our meeting was such that it brought me no joy at all. It had a depressing effect on me and my mood is worse than ever.... I'm sad, sad, sad.... And I have never felt so lonely! Perhaps when I get used to things here and start working....

"Send me Anton Pavlovich's address. I wrote to him in Yalta from Berlin but he must have settled somewhere by now, so do send me the address quickly. When I left I thought that the only sad thing about leaving was saying good-bye to people, but now all of a sudden I have started feeling homesick for Russia. Yesterday I suddenly heard a Russian sentence in the street, and felt so happy!"

Not long afterwards, in May 1894, Lika wrote to Chekhov about France, about Melikhovo and about how she missed home and her close friends: "Soon it will be two months since I came to Paris and not a word from you yet. Surely, you have not turned your back on me as well? I feel dreary, sad and out of sorts, and Paris makes it all worse! It's damp, cold and unfriendly. Without you I feel forgotten and rejected. I would give half a life-time to be in Melikhovo, sit on your couch, talk to you for ten minutes, then have supper...."

Yet in many respects Lydia Mizinova's sojourn in Paris was successful. Leading professors of singing such as the famous Ambroselli supported her in her wish to study and they defined her voice as a dramatic soprano of pleasant timbre. She started to take lessons under the first class vocalist Masson. Lika also went to concerts at the Grande Opéra where the repertoire included *Faust* and Verdi's *Otello* which productions she enjoyed less than those at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. She visited art exhibitions and annual salons of the Champs Elysées and the Champ de Mars, and probably others as well although she did not appreciate the new "left" schools and longed to hear Levitan's opinion of them. She read a great deal of French although the fin de siècle literature did not appeal to her. Nor did Lydia abandon her piano playing. She studied Beethoven and worked at Chopin's études, Mendelssohn's piano concerto, and at the same time sang arias from *La Gioconda* and learned arias from *Tannhäuser*. This enabled her to take part in student concerts.

However, the circumstances of her private life were to disrupt all her plans. Her love affair did not prosper and proved a failure. Events took an unexpectedly dramatic turn which put paid to all Lydia's plans and hopes.

Balzac's city only brought her the pain of "illusions perdues". Apart from all the disappointments of an emotional nature, signs of consumption appeared: Lika started coughing blood. Her doctors insisted that she leave Paris immediately for the mountains. In August she set off for Switzerland where she stayed first in Lucerne and Montreux, and later in a mountain village overlooking the castle of Chillon. She was looking for complete solitude and sadly admitted that she had found it.

Potapenko meanwhile returned to Russia and his literary pursuits. Varvara Eberlet had by this time been taken on by a Russian opera company and also returned to her native country.

Not a single friend to turn to!

Once again the correspondence with Chekhov starts up:

"September 20, 1894.... Your postcard from Taganrog was like a breath of cold wind! It seems it is my fate that everyone I love is bound to scorn me in the end. Yet for some reason I still want to talk to you today despite everything. I am feeling very, very wretched. Don't laugh! Not a trace of the old Lika is left and, as I see it, you and no other are to blame! Yet that, too, must have been my fate! All I can say is that I have lived through moments I never thought I should have to live through! I am quite alone. Here there is not one soul, to whom I could tell all that I am going through. May God preserve others from the same situation. All this sounds vague but to you I am sure everything is clear! You are not a psychologist for nothing! Why I am writing all this to you I do not know. All I do know is that apart from you I shall not be writing to anyone! So do not even show Masha this letter or say anything about it to her. I am in a state where the ground's slipping away from under my feet and I feel that I am suspended in mid-air somewhere in an atmosphere that is definitely wretched. I do not know whether you will try and understand me. After all; you are a calm, sober and level-headed person whose whole life is devoted to other people, as if you had no wish to have an emotional life of your own! Write to me and quickly. Write because here I have no one to turn to who might help me achieve level-headed calm. It would seem that if I have to stay here for even another few days, my endurance will be at an end. In you I have faith and so am anxious to receive a few lines from you."

After Potapenko came back to Russia Chekhov contemplated going to Paris and visiting Lika. He wrote to his sister of this intention on October 2, 1894, when he was staying in Nice. He wondered whether there was any point in seeing her again. Just to comfort an abandoned woman? Just to renew an interrupted friendship? But soon it emerged that the circumstances of the two former friends have changed so much that this was impossible. Undaunted, life makes its decisions and carries them out. So much in life is irrevocable and cannot be repeated, as Lika's letters from Switzerland illustrated only too well.

## V

At the beginning of November Lydia Mizinova returned to Paris. On November 8, 1894, she gave birth to a daughter whom she called Christina. This event seemed to her to mark a new start in life, a chance of genuine happiness. Now there could be an end to the restless searching and vain endeavours!

In Paris the young mother rented a small flat and hired a French wet-nurse and a Russian nanny by the name of Nastya. Soon Lydia Mizinova was to start making plans for her return to Russia, and plucking up courage to break the news to her closest relatives and friends of what had happened. Back in Moscow her mother did not yet know any of the story.

On February 5, 1895, Lika, in a first attempt to warn or prepare her mother, wrote in a letter: "Soon, my dear, we shall see each other again, because I need you so badly to help me muster new strength. All I live for at the moment is the thought of seeing you again and talking to you as friend to friend! After all, you are my best and only friend, aren't you? "

On February 5, 1895, Maria Chekhova was to receive the following outpouring: "I only suffer as a result of circumstances.... I pay no heed to what is said. I am right, because I followed this course only after considering the consequences and I knew what I was embarking on. Admittedly, everything seemed so simple then! Everything seemed within our grasp, but now it is clear that what we both hoped for is out of the question! ... My life does and will centre round one thing and one only, my little girl! But you know, sometimes there are days when I am afraid to go into the nursery and look at her, lest the wet-nurse should see how sad I am, because I cannot help crying when I look at the little girl! She embodies all that was ever good or pure in my life. The awareness that it is all

over, that all that was good lasted only three months and then came to an end is unbearable. No, I cannot write any more! One thing I beg of you, whatever other people might say, however much you might feel sorry for me, do not blame Ignati! Believe me, he is the man you and I imagined him to be."

A most apt comment on these words is provided by Treplev's comments on the letters Nina Zarechnaya sent him. "She did not complain, but I realised that she was deeply unhappy. Every line was like a tense, aching nerve...."

Nor does Lydia Mizinova bemoan her fate. Yet her confession bespeaks a real-life tragedy.

Chekhov must undoubtedly have read these pages, which cannot fail to have moved him both as a man and as an artist. Among his many personal impressions of the contemporary theatrical and literary world, these remain one of the principal sources of inspiration for *The Seagull*.

## VI

Yet if the truth were told, Potapenko was not the man the Melikhovo "sisters" pictured him to be. This competent musician and prolific writer proved timid, bewildered and helpless in the face of real life. Depressed by constant domestic scenes he admitted that he was powerless to secure the happiness of the woman he loved.

In the spring of 1895 Lydia Mizinova arrived in Moscow for a short visit leaving her daughter in the care of the two nurses. Her mother was to justify Lydia's hopes: she did prove to be her daughter's best and only friend. She accepted everything and forgave Lydia: her attitude was one of kind understanding and she immediately started making arrangements for the now highly complicated domestic situation. While still in Paris Lika had written her a letter stating that she planned to rent a room for Christina and the wet-nurse in Arbat Street, while she would make it look as if she were staying at home, "so that everything would be tidily arranged with no loose ends". However, Lydia Alexandrovna could not conceal the birth of a grand-daughter from her closest friends and relatives, that is from the cousins at Pokrovskoye. On May 7, 1895, Sofia Johanson notes in her diary that she was about to sit down and write a letter of congratulation to Lydia on the birth of a grand-daughter.

At the end of the summer Lydia returned to Russia from Paris with her daughter and the nurse. It must be around that time that she wrote her mother an undated letter that is important for an understanding of Potapenko's position in the situation: "Ignati Nikolayevich is very anxious to see you and keeps on talking about it voicing this wish. I think it would be awkward if he were to come to see you at home because of Zhenya, Parasha and the embarrassment it might cause, which I suppose is inevitable! If only you could perhaps carry your magnanimity so far as to bring yourself to come and see us and meet him that way! Dearest mother, do this if you can, unless of course it is too big a sacrifice to ask of you! All this I leave completely up to you, but must add that I should be happy in the knowledge that the two people who are dearest of all to me had met and understood one another. Ignati Nikolayevich is most distressed that you might think worse of him than really need be, and that he might not be able to convince you here and now that everything, which has to happen, *will* happen very soon so that all of us will be happy at last! I, for my part, wish only that you might see each other, for I am sure any bitterness you might feel against him will pass, once you find yourselves face to face."

Whether this meeting ever took place history does not relate. Before long Potapenko disappeared from the horizon of this Moscow family for good. It would seem that any further contacts were of a strictly business nature.

For a time Lydia Mizinova brought her little daughter to live at the estate of Pokrovskoye in the care of her "Granny Sofia" and Aunt Panafidina.

At the beginning of November Christina fell sick with croupous pneumonia. Medical assistance on that country estate far from any town, or even dispensary, was virtually non-existent. Doctors were available only as far away as Rzhev or Staritsa. Sofia Johanson records the inexorable progress of the catastrophe: "*Saturday, November 9th.* Christina is very unwell. There is a wet rattle in her chest. *Sunday, November 10th.* The doctor came, thank Heavens, examined her and says there is a chance that he can save her. *Tuesday, November 12th.* Lydia went to Moscow on the evening train. Misha\* saw her to the station. Christina's chest is still blocked. *Wednesday, November 13th.* Lydia came back from Moscow. Christina's condition is dangerous. She has the croup. We sent a telegram to

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\* Mikhail Panafidin, Lydia Mizinova's cousin.—*Ed.*

Grandmother Lydia telling her to come at once. Our doctor came and said there is no hope of a recovery. May God's will be done.... *Thursday, November 14th.* Our dear little Christina passed away at four o'clock in the morning. Poor Lydia, what a little angel she has lost. May God comfort her and teach her to be good, to lead a sensible life. *Saturday, November 16th.* Christina's funeral. Everything is upside down here: the whole house is being spring-cleaned for fear of the other children being infected after the warnings of that heartless doctor. Yet poor little Christina caught cold because of her nurse's carelessness, her disease was not infectious, pneumonia pure and simple. The poor child suffered horribly; it was pneumonia all the same and the doctor had no call to start up all the pandemonium. The very same day Lydia left for Moscow with the two nurses. How is she going to cope with life now? It must be terrible for her to go back to that empty flat of hers without the little one, for whom a nest with toys was waiting."

During that cruel year Chekhov wrote his story *My Life*. It was printed in October and November of 1896, the year when *The Seagull* proved a fiasco at the Alexandrinsky Theatre and when two-year-old Christina died.

Despite the title of this story it contained little of Chekhov's own biography. Yet there is a brief sketch of Lika Mizinova in it which serves to shed light on her life as a whole. What does the young girl from the provinces, Masha Dolzhikova aspire to in her search for the meaning of life? Where does this search lead? To one thing only: "Beloved, beloved art!". Only art "can lend us wings and carry us far, far away! He who is tired of dirt, worthless petty concerns, he who is insulted or indignant can only find peace and fulfilment in the beautiful...." At a rehearsal for a musical evening she sings Tchaikovsky's romance set to words by Polonsky.

"The song was over, enthusiastic applause followed and she smiled, extremely happy, her eyes a-sparkle as she leaved through her music, patted her dress into place, just like a bird who had at last broken free from its cage and was spreading wide its wings in freedom."

This is no mere superficial sketch but a portrait of Lydia Mizinova's essential being. Here the *Seagull* motif is taken up again so to speak, but this time with a variation. Chekhov would show us that the search after art is one of the most precious treasures of this life. Even if we do not achieve its heights, the mere quest for them enables us to break free from our cages and spread wide our wings in freedom....

In *The Seagull* another flight was depicted—up above the clouds to sparkling mountains and eternal snows. Let us examine how Chekhov treated this most difficult of themes, these surges, falls and soaring flights, this life of a small circle of actors and writers, which engendered his drama of passionate creative quests. An English critic was to write in the *London Mercury* in 1922 that since the time of Shakespeare no one else had achieved such penetration of the human soul.

### Chapter Three

#### I

At the beginning of July, 1895, a telegram summoned Chekhov to Tver Province to help Levitan who had just made an attempt on his life. He was to learn that on the picturesque banks of the Ostrovno Lake near Vyshni Volochok another emotional drama had been played out which had led up to this unexpected conclusion.

A year previously, in July 1894, Levitan had settled down for the summer with his customary companion for these excursions through the Russian countryside, Sofia Kuvshinnikova, in a house by a lake in the estate of Ostrovno belonging to the Ushakov sisters. On the opposite shore was the estate of Gorka where the wife of a landowner and privy councillor, Anna Turchaninova, used to spend the summer with her two daughters.

It was not long before the family of the Petersburg dignitary made the acquaintance of the wandering artists. A friendship sprang up, which before long gave rise to a dramatic emotional conflict. Levitan's infatuation with Anna Turchaninova made him part company with Sofia Kuvshinnikova. Abandoning her, he went to stay in the picturesque surroundings of Gorka, where Varya, the elder daughter, was to lose her heart to him as well. It was to her that Levitan presented his exquisite pastel drawing, *Bunch of Cornflowers* with the dedication: "To wonderfully kind Varya Turchaninova—a keepsake from Levitan. 1894."

In May, 1895, Levitan returned to the Turchaninovs' estate where once again he found himself among attentive friends and could take delight in the beauties of nature and the books from the richly stocked rare family library. Yet the rivalry which had started to grow up between mother and daughter the year

before, now acquired such proportions that on June 21st Levitan attempted to shoot himself. Fortunately the bullet only inflicted a skin wound and did not damage his skull. He greeted Chekhov with a black bandage round his head which he tore off and threw to the floor in the heat of the confrontation with the ladies that followed. Mikhail Chekhov was later told by his brother how Levitan then "took up his gun and went down to the lake. He returned to the lady of his affections with a poor seagull he had shot for no reason at all and which he cast down with a flourish at her feet. These two motifs are later expanded by Anton Pavlovich in *The Seagull*."

A similar episode from a different period is related in the lively reminiscences of Sofia Kuvshinnikova. "One day early in the morning we went out hunting in the meadows on the far side of the river. While we were waiting for the boat to take us across the Volga I sat down on the earth mound by a lake-side hut, while Levitan walked absent-mindedly up and down the deserted bank with his gun tucked under his arm, and seagulls glided to and fro over our heads.

"All of a sudden Levitan took aim, a shot rang out and a poor white bird somersaulted in the air and then fell in a lifeless heap onto the sand. I was infuriated by this senseless cruelty and remonstrated angrily. At first he looked dazed but then he too expressed regret at what he had done.

"Yes, yes, it's a horrible thing to have done. Shameful and horrible. I drop my base deed at your feet and vow that I shall never do anything like that again'.

"Then he actually did drop the seagull at my feet...."

Eventually the episode with the seagull was forgotten, although Levitan might well have told Chekhov about it, and then he in his turn may have remembered it when he came to write his *Seagull*....

In fact, Chekhov did remember these episodes when he decided to write a play that treated love dramas and problems of art. In the second act of *The Seagull* Treplev comes in with a gun under his arm and lays a dead bird at Nina's feet with the words: "I did a dreadful thing today—I killed a seagull. I'm laying it at your feet."

The young girl was unpleasantly taken aback, wondering what this talk full of symbols was all about, and what was a dead seagull meant to symbolise anyway?

These actual incidents are lent deeper significance as Chekhov uses them to convey his overall idea and amplifies them in his drama. The main theme takes shape, that of



Konstantin's love and jealousy: reproaches are heard, suicide is threatened and there is an announcement that a manuscript that was misunderstood and ridiculed has been burnt. The deadly aphorism is uttered: "Women never forgive failure."

The episode is rounded off with Trigorin reading his notes which serve to clarify the puzzling symbolism of the wounded bird: on the shore of the lake there lives a young girl; a man came and destroyed her, just like the seagull....

A seemingly unimportant incident during a hunting expedition crystallises as the nucleus of the impending drama. In the third act Treplev appears with a bandage round his head after a suicide attempt. In real life Levitan had only scratched his temple driven to distraction by the rivalry between two women. That episode was almost comic. Chekhov, on the other hand, makes of it the tragic leitmotif of Treplev's fate. This particular hero not merely goes through the outward details of Levitan's experience but to a certain extent provides a spiritual portrait of the famous artist. Despite all the differences in their styles, the author of the *World Soul* and the great landscape painter both stand out as highly impressionable, easily roused and extremely vulnerable. Subject to abrupt changes of mood—ecstatic creative uplift followed by attacks of disillusionment and anguish—Levitan can in many respects be regarded as a prototype for Konstantin Treplev with his bursts of despair and leanings to suicide.

This brings us to the play's central theme, the tragedy of the innovator ridiculed by his contemporaries. Levitan was no favourite of fame and fortune as might have been imagined. His path to fame had been long and difficult. He wrote to Chekhov that his boundless love of nature was a source of profound suffering to him, for there was nothing more tragic than to sense the infinite beauty of one's surroundings and yet be unable to express what one sensed. "Oh Lord, when shall I be able to bridge that gap? ..."

Reminiscences of Levitan contain many references to the afflictions and adversities that beset this artist. In his youth he had known grim poverty. In 1879 he was expelled from the confines of Moscow by the police. Although his sensitive perception of the Russian countryside had already been strikingly obvious in his student pictures and attracted attention, on leaving art school Levitan was not awarded the large silver medal for which Savrasov had put his name forward, and a few years later he was only to qualify as a drawing and calligraphy teacher.

Constant worry and disappointment eventually undermined Levitan's health. He suffered from fits of melancholy and an incurable heart disease, which indeed was destined to bring him to an early grave at the age of forty. His friend Nesterov had good reason to refer to him as the "successful failure".

The main lever of this drama was Levitan's urge to search for new pathways. In his efforts to reveal to the full the spiritual poetry of the Russian landscape, its hidden inner beauty, he sought after new techniques, a new level of expressiveness and infinitely subtle texture. That was how the "musical quality of the pictures" took shape, the melodious themes, the resonance of colours, everything which Chekhov had set such store by in Levitan's "splendid muse".

It is in this way that Levitan is echoed in the tragic innovator, Konstantin Treplev, opposed to stereotypes and clichés and engaged in a passionate search for new forms along uncharted artistic paths, which he was unable to evolve in his early, immature writings.

## II

Chekhov as a writer was always attracted by the image of a Russian actress. Both the female leads in *The Seagull*, Nina Zarechnaya and Irina Arkadina give Chekhov an opportunity to expand on this theme so dear to his heart. Yet they also echo in part real figures in the contemporary theatre.

The figure of Arkadina in his play reflects certain characteristics of Yavorskaya who was a friend of Chekhov's at the time. Nevertheless, that type of actress was alien to him. This follower of Sarah Bernhardt aspired after "outward success, which was for her more important than anything else, even than art and creation," recalls her co-actor Yuriev. She made it her aim to be the centre of attraction and scorned no kind of self-advertisement to this end, always fanning sensations, striving for outward effect and making a splash wherever she went. This gifted actress devoted herself wholeheartedly to the emulation of the outward mannerisms of the famous French celebrity, thereby losing all her originality.

Many statements of Arkadina's echo Yavorskaya's letters to Chekhov: "What a reception I got in Kharkov. Goodness me: My head's still swimming from it all! The students gave me a standing ovation. Three baskets of flowers, two wreaths and this.... (*Takes off a brooch and throws it down on the table.*) I

was wearing the most divine outfit.... Say what you like, but I do know a thing or two about how to dress."

In a letter to Chekhov written in March 1895, Yavorskaya describes her tour in Nizhny Novgorod and St. Petersburg with Korsh's troupe; she was pleased with her "theatrical successes", "ovations" and "presentations", etc.

Such an actress of the French school in no way corresponded to Chekhov's notion of the modern stage-artist endowed with profound lyricism and inspired sensitivity. In a letter to Suvorin written on March 30, 1895, Chekhov gave a detailed assessment of Korsh's leading lady: "Go and see *Madame sans Gêne* and take a look at Yavorskaya.... She is gracious and well-dressed, and on occasions sparkingly witty. She is the daughter of Kiev police chief Gibennet, so actors' blood flows through her arteries and police blood through her veins. Moscow newspaper men left her no peace, hounding her down the whole winter but she did not deserve that. If it was not for loudness and certain mannerisms (ridiculous affectation sometimes), her acting would be the genuine article."

This assessment does not really do Yavorskaya justice. Summing up Yavorskaya's work in 1921 when she died outside Russia, one of the leading theatrical critics of that time, Nikolai Efros referred to her as a colourful and original figure in the Russian theatre. "She was an impetuous and energetic actress, with a tremendous capacity for work, all out to assert herself and win fame. She was the exact opposite of Ermolova who was so modest and restrained. Yavorskaya's theatrical egocentrism opened the door to sensational success, controversy, debates among the critics, but all this barred the way to serious and profound recognition and this was her particular tragedy. Moreover, Yavorskaya was bereft of some very important scenic attributes: her voice was on the hoarse side, her movements abrupt, and there was something almost morbidly highly-strung about her. Yet her genuine passion for the theatre and tremendous dedication to her art brought great triumphs her way: she made a touching Marguerite Gautier and an intimidating Mademoiselle Fifi from Maupassant's story. When working on parts such as *Madame sans Gêne* and the pure young heroine in Sofia Kovalevskaya's play *The Fight for Happiness* she achieved an interesting and expressive interpretation of both roles, incontestably proving her flexibility and tremendous capacity for work in the theatre. She was the first actress to introduce a large range of new roles into the Russian theatrical repertoire going as far as the Indian theatre in her creative searchings."

Through the character of Arkadina Chekhov succeeded in repudiating this particular type of actress—the leading lady always on tour and giving benefit performances, capricious and egocentric. Thereby Chekhov anticipated the appearance of a new Russian Theatre. Before a year had elapsed after *The Seagull's* première a dialogue of inestimable importance took place in a private dining-room at the Slavyansky Bazar restaurant between Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky:

“Take actor A. Do you think he has talent? ”

“Very much so.”

“Would you ask him to join your troupe? ”

“No.”

“Why? ”

“All his work is aimed at furthering his career and he has adapted his gifts to the demands of the public, his character to the entrepreneur’s requirements.”

Actress B. is also unacceptable: “She does not love art, but only herself in art.” Actress C. was out of the question for she was “an incorrigible glory-chaser”.

“And Actor D.? ”

“He is worth taking notice of.”

“Why? ”

“He has ideals, that he is ready to fight for; he is not content to stop at what has already been achieved. He is a man of principle....”

This newly conceived theatre of an unprecedented kind that set actors free from the shackles of social traditions and stage conventions and was concerned first and foremost with a search for meaning themes of a new art, was the Moscow Arts Theatre soon to become world-famous. It was the advent of this theatre that Chekhov proclaimed in his caricature of a “frenzied glory-chaser” Arkadina, and, side by side with her, the pure figure of the bold young actress ready to uphold her creative ideals at all costs, as Nina Zarechnaya is presented in Act IV of *The Seagull*.

### III

Why did Lydia Mizinova announce in such confident tones to Nikolai Khodotov, who played the role of Treplev, that this particular character was Chekhov’s self-portrait? After all, the stage character has very little in common with the suggested prototype.

Yet it cannot be denied that there are considerable grounds for this assertion. Chekhov was to regard himself as an unsuccessful playwright almost to the very end of his life. "I am no dramatist", "Oh, why did I spend time writing plays instead of stories", "I am not a playwright, I tell you, but a doctor", and other such phrases abounded in his letters and conversation. Contemporary drama critics also went out of their way to convince him of this and, so did the audiences at his premieres, and sometimes even leading celebrities of the theatre.

Chekhov's preoccupation with drama started very early. While still a second-year student (i.e., in 1880/1881) Chekhov wrote a full-length psychological drama about a modern hero of weak character and a strong-principled Russian woman of a proud heart and powerful emotions. He wrote this play for young Ermolova and was counting on her using it for one of her benefit productions. Yet the actress merely returned him the manuscript, which he then tore up as Treplev does his in the fourth act of *The Seagull*.

Yet Chekhov's first play had been full of promise. The student author had created convincing characters and already started to evolve his bold new style.

The central character in this play was the village school-teacher Platonov, a man of outstanding ability doomed to vegetate in a backwater with no scope for large-scale activities commensurate with his gifts and intellectual potential. This character foreshadowed Ivanov, Doctor Astrov, Voinitsky and in some respects Layevsky. In society he was regarded as an eccentric, philosopher, Byronist, Hamlet, Don-Juan, "a great sage and philosopher", "a contemporary version of Chatsky" who had lost his bearings in questions of morals and love. Indeed, his attitude to life is to prove his undoing for he is shot dead by a young woman whom he had deceived. The hero's fate leads those around him to muse upon his life, and their comments set the familiar tone for Chekhov's future plays of mood, his elegies so rich in undercurrents. Here we can already sense motifs that give us an inkling of what was to come in Chekhov's mature drama.

It is therefore not surprising that in recent times this work by the young Chekhov has become a cultural event in its own right and has been shown on stages in Russia and Western Europe. How amazed the young dramatist and the famous actress would have been if they could only know that this spurned play was to be resurrected seventy years later in Paris amidst wild applause and ecstatic ovations in one of Europe's

leading theatres, France's Théâtre National with Jean Villar and Marie Casares in the leading roles. Before that particular production the play had been put on in Stockholm and Kharkov, Pskov and Alma-Ata.

Such was the fate of Chekhov's first dramatic "fiasco".

In 1889 Chekhov staged a comedy *Wood-Demon* in Abramova's private theatre in Moscow. This play represented an open declaration of his new dramatic credo: "all movement in the drama is transposed within the characters", "the overall tone is pure lyric poetry"—these principles which were soon to come into their own in Chekhov's major plays had the press, actors and audience all up in arms. Daring to disregard the canons of the stage! Imagining he was a writer for the theatre! Trying to transpose to the stage every-day life just as it was! An "outright aberration", etc. On this occasion even first-class actors such as Kiselevsky, Solovtsov, and Glebova were unable to save the play from complete fiasco.

Yet the author refused to stand down. He knew that there were precious seeds of a great play and the outlines of first-class stage characters in *The Wood-Demon*. A number of dialogues and scenes were so polished and mature that they could be incorporated in the final version of a new play without undergoing any fundamental modification. In *The Wood-Demon* we already find the famous maxim: "In man everything should be beautiful: his face, his clothes, his heart and his thoughts."

Chekhov, like his hero who protected the Russian woods from destruction, resolved to save from destruction the unappreciated "beauty" of this play. With the unswerving resolve of a great artist Chekhov remoulded *The Wood-Demon* as a new play. Insignificant characters were eliminated and Uncle Vanya was made the hero; Voinitsky's suicide was replaced by a mis-aimed shot at the professor; Yelena Andreyevna no longer deserted her husband; the artificial ending that had been "grafted on", so to speak, gave way to the final monologue of haunting beauty, and the character of Sonya was to become one of the finest heroines of Russian literature. Defeat was turned into victory. *The Wood-Demon* that had been hissed off the stage became one of the great dramas of the Russian theatre.

Such was the path trodden by Chekhov the dramatist. His steadfast endeavour to find new theatrical forms was almost always doomed to meet with rejection, censure, ridicule. Not even *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* were a success when they were first staged. The drama that overtakes

innovator Konstantin Treplev, is an echo of the sad theatrical destiny of Chekhov's *The Wood-Demon*, of the debates which he had been obliged to conduct with the "pillars" of the Maly Theatre—Yuzhin, Lensky, Nemirovich, Potapenko. Yet Chekhov was already aware of new paths opening up before the Russian theatre and his passionate longing to chart them finds expression in the character of Treplev doomed to failure in his search for unknown creative heights.

Chekhov does not expose Treplev's weaknesses but rather unfolds his tragedy. The sympathies of the author are as always on the side of the tragic hero. The self-satisfied "orthodox artists" reject Konstantin's play out of hand; we hear Arkadina and Trigorin dismiss it as "decadent nonsense" with the phrase such as, "I failed to grasp any of it". Meanwhile the positive characters in the lake-side group, Dorn and Masha Shamrayeva are thrilled by what they have seen, speak of their "deep impression" and ask Konstantin to read them more of the play. Nina Zarechnaya, still a shy and modest amateur, does not yet understand a play bereft of love and action, but later, after she has become a professional actress, delivers once again her opening monologue in tones of inspired rapture: "Men, lions, eagles and partridges." This monologue is not a parody but a thoughtful and subtle stylisation of the new theatre with its philosophical subject matter and abstract characters. The sensitive Dorn encourages the author with the words: "That was quite right, because a work of art must express an important idea. Only serious things can be beautiful." What a noble, wise and truly Chekhovian motto applied to a bold and misunderstood experiment!

Such was the struggle Chekhov had to wage to assert his new theatrical language. A. Roskin aptly commented: "At that time news was filtering through to Russia of Antoine's Théâtre libre in Paris, of independent circles of playwrights and actor-innovators, of the Freie Szene in Berlin staging the plays of the young Hauptman "whose masterly skill could no longer be contained within old concepts of stagecraft."... In the journal *Artist* (Actor) an article appeared in 1894 calling on budding dramatists to inject new life into the theatre, and raising the question of the setting up of a "free theatre" in Russia.

It was against this background of new ideas that Chekhov wrote his play in 1895. In his letters he even referred to himself as an innovator-playwright. He declared that he composed his play "in defiance of all rules of dramatic art": "*I throw stage*

*convention to the winds.*" He demands "new endings for plays" and a "new era" bringing a resolute break with the obligatory marriages or suicides to round everything off neatly. He himself uses quite unfamiliar, open endings pointing into a distant future.

The most astute of Chekhov's contemporaries were highly appreciative of his creative feat. Gorky's assessment of *Uncle Vanya* and *The Seagull* is well known: this is "a new type of dramatic art in which realism is elevated to the level of an inspired and meticulously thought-out symbol.... Other plays fail to lead men from realistic detail on to philosophical generalisations, but yours achieve this...."

Stanislavsky acknowledged *The Seagull* as a decisive turning-point in the history of the Arts Theatre: "Putting intuition and emotion before all else was something Chekhov taught me." It was Chekhov and none other who gave this theatre its magnificent symbol and enhanced its realism with the most advanced dramatic ideas. This is how he speaks of *The Seagull*: "Then at the end: the autumn evening, the patter of raindrops on the window-panes, silence, a card-game and in the distance a sad Chopin waltz; then it fades away ... a shot rings out—a life has ended." What name should be given to this new style of irresistible truthfulness and spiritual anguish, in which the "subtlest movements of the soul are permeated with the unfading poetry of Russian life"? The great master of the theatre was to call it first impressionism and then find a more apt and profound name for it—*inner realism*.

The main initiator of the famous production of *The Seagull* of 1898, Nemirovich-Danchenko held that the Arts Theatre began life not with *Tsar Fyodor* but with *The Seagull* and that "only with Chekhov did the new theatre and its revolutionary implications take shape".

Thus the leading members of the literary and theatrical world did appreciate Chekhov as a great dramatist engrossed in an untiring search for new goals and new objectives for the contemporary stage. They all felt that before them was not an imitator but an explorer, innovator opening up new vistas. In this lay the fundamental difference between Chekhov and the prolific Potapenko who sought and strove after nothing.

#### IV

While Chekhov was working on his early dramas Potapenko completed his first play *Life*. This play that was artistically straightforward and highly accessible proved a great success in



both the Maly and Alexandrinsky theatres and later throughout the Russian provinces and even in Serbia's National Theatre in Belgrade.

Potapenko's plays were all to prove tremendously popular with the ordinary theatre-going public. Komissarzhevskaya appeared in his *Magic Fairy-Tale* and *Redemption*. His *Strangers*, *Bereft of Rights*, *Scoundrel* and many other plays were staged all over the country. In 1918 his *Volunteers* ran in several towns and in 1922 *The Cassock* was staged. Yet this outward success does not testify to any inherent significance and not one of Potapenko's plays still figures in the Soviet repertoire today, while Chekhov's plays have come into their own since 1917 and been accorded their rightful place.

This difference in the attitudes of these two playwrights to the canons of the stage led to heated arguments between them which served to crystallise their very different stands as authors of modern plays. This background is of great importance for an understanding of *The Seagull*.

Potapenko considered that Chekhov's plays were not theatrical enough: that they lacked the "conventional development of a dramatic plot with a gradual mounting of tension and final climax" that he held to be essential if a play was to grip its audience.

"I said (to Chekhov) that the stage sets us perfectly justified tasks of a conventional nature and that if a writer is unwilling to submit to these, then he should turn his back on the stage and choose another form of literature in which to depict his characters."

Chekhov, for his part, could not accept this. "... No plots are necessary. There are no plots in life, in life everything is mixed up together, the profound with the trivial, the great with the petty, the tragic with the comic. You gentlemen are simply the hypnotised slaves of convention which you cannot bring yourselves to ignore. *We need new forms, new forms....*"

"This last phrase Chekhov was to repeat frequently and in *The Seagull* he made Treplev say it and also repeat it," writes Potapenko.

These reactions serve to emphasise the similarities between Potapenko and Trigorin. The flourishing writer on whom success is lavished, who, while not lacking talent, nevertheless follows well-trodden paths; after achieving acclamation and fame at an early age he becomes indifferent to creative searchings and complex problems of new art, he is incapable of rising above "glib skill" to the major concerns of the age and

the broad horizons of such giants as Tolstoi and Zola. Only his monologue about the work of a writer, the quotation from his book *Days and Nights* and his subtle neo-realist method (the portrayal of a moonlit night with a glass fragment glinting on a dam), are worthy of Chekhov himself. Everything else, including his affair with Nina Zarechnaya is pure Potapenko. Chekhov brings out in particular Trigorin's "weak will", of which there are plenty of illustrations in the letters of both parties in the Paris romance.

Such was the opinion of well-informed contemporaries. Nemirovich-Danchenko who was on close terms with Chekhov and his entourage wrote: "Many people thought that Trigorin in *The Seagull* was based on Chekhov himself. I myself, however, felt that the model for Trigorin was most likely to be none other than Potapenko." Trigorin's attitude to women "was not like that of Anton Pavlovich and resembled more closely Potapenko's". As a writer Potapenko "set little store by what he wrote and used to joke about his own works. He lived extravagantly and was sincere, unassuming and weak-willed."

All these features of the model are to be found in the character of the fashionable writer in *The Seagull*, who, while being entertaining and straightforward in his writing, lacked that all-important striving after what was new and elusive, the very quality that bespeaks a true artist. It is worth remembering that Chekhov even warned young Gorky against "conservative form".

## V

Nemirovich-Danchenko did not consider that Nina Zarechnaya had been modelled on Lydia Mizinova. The similarities between them he regarded as a mere coincidence. "There were plenty of girls like that in those days."

Yet the plot of *The Seagull* is undeniably linked with Lika's affair with Potapenko.

However, the material Chekhov took from real life was freely reworked by him in keeping with the requirements of his creative goal. In addition to Lika's Paris letters, he had learnt many details from Potapenko himself and all this he was to incorporate and transform in his play.

He gave the affair a different finale as well. The author of *The Seagull* spread wide the wings of the injured bird preparing it for a flight to the sun. He opened for her the path for a creative future. In the fourth act we find ourselves face to face

with a great tragic actress of a new type reminiscent in many respects of the symbolist theatre in its progressive aspirations which the Soviet repertoire has cultivated with productions of plays by Ibsen, Hauptmann and Maeterlink.

What made Chekhov rework his material in this bold way?

The theatre at that time was in a state of flux. A new galaxy of actors had appeared which embodied the younger generation's yearning for major changes in history. These new actors sought to embody in their stage characters the searchings of their finest contemporaries, the new outlook of the progressive men and women of the nineties. The effective Yavorskaya in roles like Madame sans Gêne had been succeeded by the young Komissarzhevskaya and her quite different but no less inspired creations such as Ostrovsky's Larissa Ogudalova and Verochka in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*. At the very moment when Chekhov was starting work on *The Seagull* this young actress, whom Stanislavsky had already invited to join his Moscow dramatic circle, was signing a contract with the Alexandrinsky Theatre, where she was soon to play Nina Zarechnaya in a new style, deeply emotional and coloured by premonition of approaching storms.

This new acting style, which was to usher in a new age in the Russian theatre, was tragic and rebellious, heightened by a sense of sorrow and projected into the future; it was the flight of the seagull with blood-stained wings over broad expanses of water. This was the acting style which accorded best with the image of Nina Zarechnaya and which served to determine the tone of her final monologue.

In his play Chekhov illustrates this watershed in the development of Russian art. He places opposite the famous and resplendent Arkadina an unknown modest actress of the new type, whose fate in many respects foreshadowed Komissarzhevskaya's future. One of Chekhov's friends noted most aptly: "Chekhov, who before the first performance of *The Seagull* had never seen Komissarzhevskaya, seemed to have modelled his Nina-seagull on her, even down to the tiniest everyday details. The first performance of the play that was to be a turning point in the rebirth of Russian drama, was to be linked forever with the name of her who boldly and passionately followed that path of artistic renewal."

This explains why Chekhov later wrote to Komissarzhevskaya of his wish to write a play for her: "Not for some particular theatre but for you. *I have long dreamt of doing this.*"

This background clarifies the question as to the model for Nina Zarechnaya, a complex and profound character extending beyond the personality of Lydia Mizinova and the framework of her lifework.

Nevertheless the skeleton of the plot does coincide with a period from Lika's life. This applies to her theatrical aspirations, her admiration for artists and her infatuation with a famous writer. Then again we find Lydia's shyness, timidity and lack of skill (although Nina Zarechnaya is subject to these only at the beginning of her career). Yet the law of lyric tragedy demanded struggle, courage and achievement. This underlies Chekhov's unravelling of the intricate relationships between his characters: the defeat of the complex-ridden writer Treplev, who has abandoned his bold aspirations for the sake of "success" with the theatre-goers, and the bold ascent of Nina Zarechnaya who achieves a moral and creative victory over "coarse life".

Lydia Mizinova, who suffered no end of defeats and was not to know creative fulfilment, cherished in her heart the character of Chekhov's Nina as an ideal vision of her character and life. even though this ideal was never to be fulfilled. This led her the more to hallow those subtle associations linking her through the fine threads of Melikhovo encounters, Moscow conversations and Parisian confessions with the seagull-heroine fortified for a flight that would know no bounds. Her love for this character was born of suffering, and Nina Zarechnaya brought hope and happiness into her barren life. This explains why Lika followed with such keen interest and a deep sense of involvement the theatrical destiny of this play, so close and relevant to her own experience.

## VI

On October 17, 1896, *The Seagull* was performed at the Alexandrinsky Theatre. The evening before Lydia Mizinova arrived in Petersburg to see this first theatrical representation of her unhappy love-affair.

This play in a new style had been misunderstood by the producer, the actors and the audience. The majority of those present laughed, protested and shouted derisive comments. The actors were taken aback and unable to maintain the performance on a sufficiently high level. Only some young members of the audience listened with excitement to Treplev's proclamation of "new forms" in art, which they interpreted as a

declaration of the aspirations of the new art. Only a few poets and art critics were full of sympathy and admiration. One of them cried out at the end of the third act: "A work of genius! "

Some of the acting was also an undeniable success. In this play Komissarzhevskaya initiated and established a new style of acting in the Russian theatre: "... a slight, fair-haired girl with a pale, anxious face, large wistful eyes and movements at once abrupt and desolate. Her hasty, highly-strung delivery gripped at the heart in its great sincerity.... In this disjointed, painful account of the Seagull's story Vera Fyodorovna, without suspecting it, was to anticipate her own future."

On her arrival in Petersburg for the première Lydia Mizinova took a room with her friend Maria Chekhova at the Hotel Angleterre on St. Isaak's Square. Chekhov told his sister that after the theatre he would come to see her and they would have a small supper-party just for close friends and relatives. However, he did not appear. Shattered by what had happened, he wandered for a long time through the streets of Petersburg and it was late into the night before he returned to the Suvorins' flat. There, too, he refused to enter into any discussion and left for Moscow on the first morning train. He left a note for his sister asking her to bring Lika with her when she next came to Melikhovo. Some link so difficult to define still existed between the dramatist and the real-life inspiration for his ill-received play.

Productions of *The Seagull* loomed as major events in the life of Lydia Mizinova. At the time of the play's triumphant rehabilitation in the Arts Theatre on December 17, 1898, when according to the critics the audience was aflame with enthusiasm, she sent warm greetings to Chekhov then in Yalta (she had learnt about the theatrical event from the Paris newspapers): "Congratulations, congratulations! I am thrilled from the bottom of my heart at the colossal success of your play. What a pity that you yourself were not present! "

The performance of December 17, 1898, was to be one of the most memorable dates in the history of the new drama.

## Chapter Four

### I

Among Vrubel's works there is an intriguing and striking portrait showing an elderly man in a frock-coat who has

lowered his heavy body into a deep arm-chair. His broad chest is covered with a stiff snow-white shirt-front as with armour. Above the monumental torso the massive head with its hooked nose and penetrating eyes full of passion and sadness is raised imperiously. Despite the monumental appearance of the venerable figure the hands that hardly seem to touch the wooden arm-rests look ready to stretch out above an easel or conductor's stand with the confident inspiration of the creative artist.

This was how the brilliant painter represented Savva Mamontov, one of the most colourful representatives of the Moscow of commerce and industry on the one hand and that of art and the theatre on the other, at the end of the last century. Vrubel's canvas captures the profound contrast between his business enterprise and creative activities. We are confronted by the organiser of the project to build a railway to the White Sea coast and the founder of the association of famous Russian painters headed by Repin, Surikov and Serov. This Russian ship-building magnate and father of the Russian operatic theatre was to bring to the world the works of Moussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov.

This eminent patron of the arts was also to play a major role in the artistic career of Lydia Mizinova. He loved to discover talent and boldly enrolled new recruits into the army of the art world. Gorky was to write: "Mamontov had a flair for recognising talent ... indeed he himself was a man of rare, enviable gifts."

At the end of the nineties Mamontov's theatre which had been founded back in 1885 was to experience its heyday. Great artists with an international future before them were engaged by him at the time—Chaliapin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rakhmaninov and Vrubel. At this illustrious period our modest heroine with her timid aspirations was also to make an appearance.

On September 12, 1897, she wrote to Chekhov that she had sung to Mamontov and been well received. This was the beginning of a new stage in her career, the operatic chapter, to be exact, when she approached nearer to her cherished goal than ever before although she failed to actually achieve it this time as well.

Savva Mamontov, a sensitive connoisseur of music and dance, most probably was interested in the young singer who had trained under renowned French vocalists. Her "soprano with its attractive timbre" (as Ambroselli had defined it) and her looks that were just right for the stage and like something straight out of Russian fairy tales must have attracted the

attention of this connoisseur of Italian *bel canto* and admirer of Vasnetsov's princesses. He agreed to send the inexperienced singer with no repertoire or stage experience behind her to Paris or Milan for two years to study for an operatic career.

However, Savva Mamontov did not hurry himself over issuing money for his future singer and Lydia only left for Paris in April 1898. She had in the meantime spent almost the whole season in Moscow where she had made friends with the troupe of the Solodovnikovsky Theatre and discovered a whole new world of interests and relationships. On September 21, 1898, Chekhov wrote to her from Yalta: "Here Chaliapin and Rozhansky (the first tenor in Mamontov's troupe) are giving concerts. Yesterday we mentioned you over supper. Everyone was praising your singing, and I was very glad."

## II

At the beginning of April, 1898, Lydia Mizinova left for Paris to embark on the next stage of her operatic career. She started taking singing lessons under Bertrami whom she thought highly of on account of her "rare knowledge". Chaliapin had also studied under her. Lika worked on arias from *Samson et Dalila*, *Les Huguenots*, *Giuditta*, *Tannhäuser* and *La Gioconda*. At the Grande Opéra she went to hear *Die Walküre* and once again was enraptured by Wagner. She took part in student concerts and in the reviews of these in the press her name is mentioned among those who reap the most applause. On February 21, 1899, she writes to Chekhov: "I recently took part in one of our student concerts at which there was an audience of 500! Just think of it! My singing on a par with other people's, but I was probably the most apprehensive of all though. Even despite my ugliness and face full of corners I am told I made a favourable impression" (this is an allusion to a former jest of Chekhov's).

In April 1899 Lydia Mizinova came back to Moscow. Mamontov's private opera was on the verge of collapse. Mamontov's political rival Finance Minister Witte, an advocate of state control over rail tariffs, would not tolerate the independent stand adopted by the Chairman of the board of the Northern Line. Witte declared in a conversation with Mamontov: "Savva Ivanovich, I have been reading in the newspapers that you are planning to take some private opera company abroad. What kind of nonsense is this? Heaven knows what is

happening on that railway of yours and you're dilly-dallying with some opera over there! " In 1899 as the result of some complex government intrigue Mamontov was accused of illegally spending 750,000 roubles from the funds of the Moscow-Yaroslavl railway and thrown into a debtor's prison. His property was inventoried and his Moscow house auctioned.

At the time of this catastrophe the famous artists from the Abramtsevo community published a declaration of their brotherly love and deep respect for the accused. An open letter to Mamontov signed by Repin, Surikov, Serov, Levitan, Vrubel, Polenov, Korovin, Antokolsky and both Vasnetsovs read as follows: "Your sensitive artistic soul responded to our creative endeavours.... You, like the born artist of the stage that you are, began to create a new truly beautiful world on it. The world of *The Arts Theatre* is the world of your active creation."

Soon Mamontov was tried and acquitted, but he was impoverished by this time and never resumed his theatrical activities.

This was the period of Lydia Mizinova's final attempts to be accepted on the operatic stage. She took part in various charity concerts, started preparing for an audition for opera classes, took part in a musical entertainment in Serpukhov, sought an engagement in a provincial operatic troupe, started working on new parts and taking lessons under Emilia Pavlovskaya (in her time the first Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin* at the Mariinsky Theatre). A typical letter of this period is one she wrote to her mother on November 26, 1900: "My plans are as follows: Lyubimov will be setting up an operatic troupe at the beginning of Lent—Lent in St. Petersburg, then Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa and the summer in Moscow. At the moment he is giving singing lessons here and everyone advises me to work under him these next few months and then he's bound to take me on in the troupe. The company will be a solid affair—the Figners, Sobinov, Chaliapin, Fostrem: all of them have been on tour already and so things are bound to go well." This plan like so many others was destined to come to nought.

What was the reason for Lydia's repeated fiascos? Why should this serious musician with a voice that held out undeniable promise and despite her training under leading Russian and foreign singers be doomed to unrelenting failure?

Lydia's tragedy was her deathly fear of audiences, her stage-fright. The whole atmosphere of an opera performance would give her a terrible fit of nerves. Even concerts of light music robbed her of all control. She became so agitated that she



forgot everything, the pattern and style for execution worked out in advance. In a letter to her mother of April 18, 1901, she provides a detailed and merciless analysis of her mental state when faced by a concert audience: "Dearest Mamma! Once again a letter has been lost. I wrote on the twelfth after the concert at which I sang, and sang badly. They say that I sang with a squeaky voice and sounded very funny! I have been in very low spirits ever since; I am sure you can imagine it. I feel very ashamed, everyone realised that it was all a matter of nerves. I borrowed money to have a dress made for the occasion and the result—a disgrace. To be sure I did sing in Moscow and should take heart at that, that I found the courage.... At the moment my head is going round in circles after this failure, but don't think that I have lost heart. It's my own fault that I can never sing in front of anyone properly and lose my bearings. Imagine, I was quite unconscious as I sang and remember nothing after the moment I walked onto the stage. Yet I sang an *encore* without mistakes, but was squeaking away in a voice I should never have recognised as my own. Don't be sorry for me. If it wasn't for the wasted money I should not be taking on so. Sanya has left for Yalta but before her departure asked whether I should be paying her her money back soon—now that was unpleasant! And then more debts over this concert. Write and tell me how things are with you. Love to you and my poor old Granny, how I love her! Kisses to Aunt and all the family. Lydia."

This shyness and lack of self-confidence that afflicted the young woman who so passionately yearned for a theatrical career made her existence really tragic. This was what accounted for her frequent attacks of depression, a feeling of a life that has passed her by and held out no promise or solution.

Fate was indeed unkind to Lika. Lack of funds obliged her at an early age to embark on an intense search for employment so as to make her living. She had to turn to various occupations and professions. She taught for a while at a high school, gave private music lessons, worked in a secretarial capacity in the Moscow Duma, did translation work, copying, tried her hand at literary pursuits, took singing and English lessons, made plans for training as a masseuse and for opening a fashion atelier and tried again to make the grade as a professional actress. She was continually in financial straits and incurred many debts, using as security a small plot of land she had inherited, in order to be able to go and study singing abroad. A typical letter of this period is one which she wrote to her mother on November 26,

1900: "Recently I was invited to sing at two charity concerts but had to turn the offer down, because I had no proper dress to appear in, and it would have been most useful; it is important for me to sing wherever I can, it means a lot as far as the future is concerned. Oh, this cursed money, it spoils everything!" Despite the constant straitened circumstances in which she found herself she never complained of hardship or the difficulty of making a living, or of her tiring work. "She never moaned," wrote Mikhail Chekhov, "and was always gay, although we knew full well what a hard time she had had so often in the past." She never faltered but continued to assert her right to engage in creative pursuits, in which she had unswerving faith. Meanwhile patterns of life around her gradually changed; new faces appeared and old friends faded from the horizon.

Levitan was slowly dying—the artist with whom "divine Lika", as he had called her in the past, maintained lasting ties of friendship. In December 1899 he was in Yalta and went to visit Chekhov. The writer's sister recalls: "The sun was shining brightly and nature was resplendent with rare beauty."

Levitan was in a very bad way. He was breathing with difficulty, finding it hard to move about and leaning on a stick. Nevertheless he insisted on a walk up into the mountains. "I want so badly to go up there where the air is lighter and it is easier to breathe."

Yet as he went he had to keep on stopping to get his breath back and each time he began to talk of death: "Marie! How I want to live! The thought of dying is so terrible and my heart is giving me such pain!"

The next spring he took to his bed in Moscow. Chekhov visited him in May and that was the last time the two friends were to meet. On July 22nd Levitan died, when a magnificent thick lilac bush had burst into flower right by the window of his studio. It was as if the Nature of central Russia was paying its last respects to the artist who had been so enamoured of its beauty.

### III

During the year when Lika was preoccupied with her operatic pursuits her correspondence with Chekhov continued, although their letters were less frequent. Part of the summer she used to spend in her relatives' estate in Pokrovskoye. From there she wrote to Chekhov on August 1, 1897: "It is very good

to be here. After all, I have known this house and garden since childhood and I feel quite a different person here. It is as if the last few years of my life had been wiped out, and I had rediscovered my former Reinheit,\* which you set so much store by in women."

In her letters of this period we still find the central motif of the early days of the friendship—reproaches for Chekhov's indifference in respect of her devotion, which by now often strike an ironic note: "I long to see you, Joseph! Potiphar's wife." (18:1:1897); "But how you took fright at the thought of bliss!" (1:11:1896). On June 24, 1897, Lika informed Chekhov that she had dreamt of him: "You were cold and correct as always." Another letter written on October 4, 1897, contains a parody of Chekhov's aphorism: "I was once foolish enough to play the role of a piece of cheese which you refused to eat."

Yet despite these sad touches of sarcasm Lika's emotions remained fundamentally unchanged. All that was new was the tone she adopted. The resolution to ask for nothing, to accept her fate, to avoid arousing even a shadow of uneasiness or displeasure in the man she loved became more marked. "You cannot imagine what kind tender feelings I have for you," Lika wrote to Chekhov on August 1, 1897. "But do not take fright and start running away from me like Pokhlechina, I do not count now, I am 'hors concours'! Yes, and my love for you is so disinterested, that it could not frighten any more.... If I had two or three thousand to hand I should set off on a trip abroad with you and I am sure that I should not encumber you in any way...."

Lika did not belong to the category of Chekhov's "admirers". She made no demands, felt no jealousy. She offered him her whole heart and asked for nothing in return.

At the beginning of 1900 she received the last letter Chekhov was to write her. It was dated January 29, 1900. This letter, like those before it, contained many jokes but the last lines were serious and sad: "Lika, here in Yalta life is grey. It does not move or flow but drags along. Do not forget me, write to me every now and again. In your letters, as in real life, you are a very interesting woman." Here as in his Vienna letter of September 18, 1894, there is a hint of a belated acknowledgement of a mistake it was too late to put right.

Yet this letter was virtually a farewell. Two years earlier on September 9, 1898, during a rehearsal of *The Seagull* at the Art.

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\* Purity (Germ.)--Ed.

Theatre, Chekhov had been introduced to the young actress Olga Knipper. This meeting Nemirovich was to refer to as “a *coup de foudre*, but a restrained one”. The romance blossomed slowly. In the spring of 1899 they met again and got to know each other better. A year later the Arts Theatre came to Chekhov in the Crimea to put on *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya* and Hauptmann’s *Lonely People*—plays in which Knipper took the female leads. The summer of that year Olga Knipper was to spend with Chekhov in Yalta.

News of the imminent marriage between the famous writer and a well-known actress started circulating in Moscow and Petersburg. On September 18, 1900, Lika wrote jealously to Chekhov: “I was told that you will perhaps be coming to Moscow (probably to see your fiancées?). Should you want to see me, send for me, but at a time when you will be alone and I shall not be in the way like last time! Otherwise one feels so awkward and out of place. The last time I saw you it was clearly a badly chosen moment! I am working on my opera parts whole days on end in preparation for an audition.... Oh, how dreary life is!”

The “last time” is most likely the occasion when Lydia Mizinova visited Chekhov during his short visit to Moscow in May 1900, when she must have found him together with his “fiancée”. On November 26, 1900, Lika wrote to her mother: “You asked about Chekhov, I saw him: he looks alright, is busy with the theatre; he is paying court and being courted. There is no end to the ovations and curtain-calls! ” Between the lines of this laconic “bulletin” a note of bitter irony is unmistakable.

At that time (the summer of 1900) Chekhov was corresponding regularly with Olga Knipper, at first writing in a very calm, restrained tone. By the beginning of August though his letters opened with such forms of address as: “My precious Olya, my happiness!” On May 25, 1901, they were married.

For all intents and purposes this put an end to the story of Chekhov’s friendship with Lydia Mizinova.

## Chapter Five

### I

On August 25, 1901 entrance-exams for would-be new members of the Arts Theatre company were held at three o’clock in the afternoon. That night Olga Knipper, who had

been on the selection board, gave her husband the following news: "You'll never guess who appeared to take the exam. Lika Mizinova.... She recited a poem by Turgenev, then Nemirovich gave her the monologue from the third act of *Uncle Vanya* to read, followed by the scene between Irina and Boris Godunov; so as you see he meanly went out of his way to give her my pieces. Everything she read was no good (between you and me), and to be honest I felt sorry for her. The selection board unanimously turned her down. Sanin said she ought to open a dress-making establishment, that is after she had left the room of course.... Tell Masha about Lika. I think they would take her on straight-away for walk-on parts; after all it's too late for her to start studying acting, and when all is said and done, there would be little point in her trying."

A month later Lydia Mizinova wrote to her mother about her new employment: "I have been taken on at the Arts Theatre.... I am very happy about this, but beset by worries at the same time, since for the first year they do not pay any salaries and how I am to exist for that year I just do not know. There will be many extra expenses for make-up, cabs and all sorts of other things. Chekhov said that I should at all costs stay with this theatre and do everything possible to pull through till next year, when I shall be given a small salary and then my career will be established! I have to dress respectably now and I have no winter-coat, not to mention little accessories. So it cuts both ways! On the one hand this is my last chance, and on the other I just don't know how things are going to work out. But don't let this worry you, Mamma; after all I am in the theatre now and this means a great deal to me. Old friends gave me a warm welcome, Alexeyev himself (i.e. Stanislavsky) and his wife (Lilina) are being very kind. For the moment there will be a lot of work for me but in minor parts, but later I shall be given better ones. I must take heart and thank God for this much." (September 25, 1901).

Walk-on parts were indeed all that came Lydia's way at the Arts Theatre. She wrote to her mother that she was in the cast of a Nemirovich-Danchenko's play *Lost in Dreams*, yet her name did not appear in the programme; she did not have a part in the real sense of the word, she merely appeared briefly on stage. On the other hand, the theatre did make effective use of her musical ability and gave Lika additional duties as a pianist. "I am often called upon to play the piano in the theatre," Lika wrote to her mother. "At the moment I am working on Liszt's *Soirées de Vienne* for Nemirovich's play of the same name."

After the première of that play on December 21, 1901, some members of the cast went to have supper at the Hermitage restaurant where they remained till the morning to catch the first notices. Knipper told Chekhov that Moskvina asked herself along to her home for morning tea together with Geltser, Lika and Alexandrov. They were chatting and laughing away until half past ten in the morning. "How do you like this dissipated life of ours?" she asked. It emerged that Olga Knipper refused to start using the intimate form of address with Lika: "I did not like the idea. She is a complete stranger for me; I do not really know her and do not feel particularly drawn to her."

On March 3, 1902, the Moscow Arts Theatre went to St. Petersburg for guest performances and Lydia Mizinova travelled with the rest of the company. She stayed at the same hotel as Knipper, Luzhsky, Butova and Sanin. Within the context of their group activities a new, more intimate relationship took shape. On March 6th Olga Knipper informed her husband: "I think Sanin is in love with Lika", and on the following day she told him: "Sanin is marrying Lika and is already accepting congratulations."

Chekhov did not approve of this marriage. On March 12th he wrote from Yalta: "I have known Lika for a long time and, despite all that may have happened, she is a fine girl, upright and intelligent. She will not be happy with Sanin, she will not be able to love him and, most important of all, she will not be able to get along with his sister. More likely than not in a year from now there will be a strapping baby and after another six months she will start being unfaithful to her husband. Oh well, I suppose it is all a question of fate."

However, Lydia Mizinova was to prove above these predictions. Her "fate" was to take quite a different course.

There is an interesting comment in a letter written to her by Sanin's sister Ekaterina Shenberg on February 21, 1904: "Masha Chekhova likes Olga less and less, while I am growing more and more attached to you. It was very intelligent of Sasha to marry you."

On April 23, 1902, Lika sent her mother the good news: "I have found someone who loves me deeply and I have agreed to be his wife.... It is our producer Sanin. He has now left the Arts Theatre and joined the Imperial Theatre in Petersburg. You saw his sister Katya at my flat last year. I know that when you see him, you will learn to love him as you do me, for his boundless, kind and noble love for me, a love which not only forgives me all, of that there is no question, but who respects me for the

away I acted all along! ... On May 31st we are going to the Crimea for two months and from there to Petersburg when work starts again. But more of all this when I see you, and for the moment let me just say that I am so happy that sometimes I can hardly believe that all this is not a dream! ...”

The only member of the Chekhov family to congratulate Lika on her marriage was Mikhail, the writer's brother, who had always felt warm friendship for her: “Dear Lika, I and my wife wish you all the best and congratulate you—in the words of Marlinsky and Karamzin—at your arrival in a peaceful haven. May God send you every happiness. Please congratulate your husband on finding such a wonderful person and kind friend as you for a wife.... I hope that you will come and see us.” During the years that the Sanins spent in Petersburg Lika did indeed renew and strengthen the old ties of friendship with Mikhail and his family.

In a letter of May 31, 1902, Chekhov wrote to his sister Maria to announce that Lika and Sanin were coming to Yalta. This news he had in all probability received from Lika herself.

Most likely they met as old friends linked by many happy memories of the past.

It was the first time that Lika saw Chekhov in this new setting and a very different person from the friend of Melikhovo days. The southern climes had left their mark on the writer and his way of life. “After breakfast the host surrounded by his guests would sit back in a deep arm-chair on the first-floor verandah. Sometimes signs of profound exhaustion would come over his pensive face, but he was so very hospitable, so loath to let his guests leave. The garden below was a carpet of roses, red, white, and pink, the enormous roses of the Crimea, while in the distance gleamed the silver sea.”

## II

Lika's husband was a man of rare integrity and a talented producer. His career in the theatre included major achievements in theatrical centres such as Moscow, Petersburg, London and Paris.

He had been working with the Arts Theatre ever since its foundation. He was Stanislavsky's main assistant producer. Together they worked on productions such as *Tsar Fyodor*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, *The Snow Maiden*, *The Wild Duck*. Single-handed he produced Sophocles'

*Antigone* in 1899. Before entering the theatre he had studied history and languages, and he was particularly interested in historical plays and Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, Ostrovsky's fairy-tale plays, scenic poems and some works of the symbolist theatre, as represented, for instance, by Ibsen. In a letter dated January 14, 1900, Chekhov referred to him as "an interesting, dependable and profound person". Sanin's letters to Chekhov are also of interest: "There is no end to my admiration for your warm yet bitter muse!" he wrote to the dramatist in January 1900.

For a long period the young producer's personal and professional life brought him little happiness. He was admittedly Stanislavsky's right-hand man, yet at the time of his marriage he had been given little work to do on his own. He was a talented actor and had made a success of the part of Johann Fokerat in Hauptmann's *Lonely People* and that of Solyony in *The Three Sisters*. Although no longer young—at the beginning of this century he was approaching fifty—Sanin had still not found personal happiness and was oppressed by his loneliness.

Marriage to Lydia Mizinova brought Sanin the happiness he had been longing for. He loved his intelligent and captivating wife with a profound love bordering on reverence. In Lika he found a devoted, educated and invaluable helpmate for all his ideas and projects. In his letters of 1903 he started addressing her not only as "my pride and joy" but also as "my mind and heart". On March 1, 1903, he wrote to his mother-in-law that "despite his grim, all-devouring languishing" for his wife he was glad that Lika had gone to Moscow. She had deserved her holiday: "My dear creature has spared no effort or nervous strain during this season helping me in my struggle and work, so I am glad she is enjoying her freedom and Moscow. She, after all, is my life, work, talent. She is the very centre of my existence.... What I have experienced with her can never be forgotten; it is the foundation and hope of my future." This separation made Sanin still more deeply and clearly aware of the place Lika occupied in his life and the role she played in all his undertakings, and projects, and in his relationships with people.

After long years of vicissitudes, happiness had come to Lika Mizinova at last. The cherished world of art opened up before her not from the stalls of the theatre or concert-hall but through life itself, activity and creative struggle which Sanin had been waging, involving his close friends and relatives in it as well. At last the theatre was to offer scope for action to this



woman who had been rejected by it for so long as singer, pianist, and actress. Now she was accepted as a producer, consultant and expert as regards composers and great actors and actresses. All the wide experience of this former pupil of Mamontov's opera company who had heard countless international celebrities perform on the Moscow and Paris stage was placed unreservedly at her husband's disposal. The work Lika was now engaged in was a large-scale task involving considerable responsibility. In the Alexandrinsky Theatre Sanin staged Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*, Ostrovsky's *False Dmitri* and *A Heart Is Not a Stone*, Trachtenberg's *Victory*, Dumas' *Caligula*, and also worked on A.K. Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan the Terrible*.

### III

On January 17, 1904 the première of *The Cherry Orchard* was to take place in the Arts Theatre. The papers were full of announcements concerning the coming theatrical event.

The first night was to coincide with Chekhov's birthday. It was decided that this particular day would be a suitable occasion to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the start of his literary career.

This event was a great occasion for the Sanin family: a new play by Chekhov, a new production by Stanislavsky, an anniversary for their dear friend and a festive occasion for the Russian theatre.

They sent the dramatist a telegram of congratulation from Petersburg: "May the subtle talent and profound poetry of your writings continue to flourish and fill the air with fragrance like today's *Cherry Orchard* for many years to come. Sincere greetings and best wishes for health and happiness from Lydia, Alexander Sanin."

Among the adulation, countless addresses, celebration speeches and congratulations these few lines stood out for their warm and sincere friendship.

Yet the great occasion was an untimely event: Stanislavsky looking back on the great jubilee recalled the daunting impression it made on him: "It smacked of a funeral."

In sorrow and alarm Chekhov's friends followed the relentless failing of the writer loved and admired by the whole country. As early as August 1903 Sanin wrote to his wife: "Tikhomirov showed me the latest picture of Chekhov, I did

not like the look of it at all. I hardly recognised the Chekhov of the old days. It pained me deeply to see the photograph. ... Yet Knipper is putting a brave face on it all and has said to Tikhomirov: 'Nothing's the matter—it's simply that we were missing Yalta.' But later she turned to Tikhomirov in alarm and said: 'Why, do you think anything's wrong, Josif Alexandrovich? ! ' She is afraid to look the situation in the face...."

Yet, despite his serious illness Chekhov was engrossed in literary plans and ideas till the end of his days. He went out of his way to serve his homeland in the grim years of the Russo-Japanese War and decided to go out to the Far East and work there as a doctor. He dreamt of a trip along the Northern rivers to the Solovetsky Islands, to Sweden and Norway; he was also keen to travel from Germany, where he was undergoing treatment at the time, to Russia by way of Italy that appealed to him with its colour, music and flowers. "Till his dying day his soul pulsed with life," wrote his wife in her reminiscences.

In 1904 Chekhov conceived a new play on a subject which had long intrigued him. It was to be the story of a great love which triumphed even over death. Its emotional message came from the very depths of the playwright's heart. A young scientist was to be the hero, in love with a woman who did not reciprocate his feelings. When he set off for the Arctic his ship was trapped in the ice; all around him there was silence, peace and the grandeur of the polar night. He is completely alone ... except for the image of the woman he loves that shines out against a background of the Northern Lights heralding his death, as it were....

That was how Olga Knipper recalled the subject of this unwritten drama. Stanislavsky summed it up in rather different words: two friends love one and the same woman. Their love and the resultant jealousy introduces tension into their friendship and they both set off on an expedition to the North Pole, etc. "Chekhov dreamt of writing what would have been a completely new kind of play for him."

That was all in the spring of 1904.

The creator of *The Seagull* was dying, yet he remained a tireless innovator to his last breath, charting out new paths for world art.

In the middle of June Chekhov was in Badenweiler, a mountain resort in the Schwarzwald. He liked the place, for the air there was invigorating and life ran on well-oiled wheels, yet he remarked: "Our Russian way of life is so much more inspired! "

Chekhov was to spend an agonising month there. He was plagued by constant coughing, breathlessness, sleepless nights and weakness that often rendered him immobile. Olga Knipper wrote to friends that he used to spend the whole day sitting quiet and patient, with only gentle words and not a hint of complaint. "Yet his heart is so heavy...."

On the evening of July 1st someone forgot to ring the gong for supper in the hotel and Chekhov started improvising a humorous sketch of the cossetted inhabitants of the resort who were stranded without their supper. So this great writer was to close his literary career the way he had begun it, with a short satirical tale, but this time an oral one because time ran out before he could write it down.

At midnight Chekhov started to suffocate. The doctor placed ice on his chest, brought oxygen cylinders and champagne. Chekhov took a sceptical view of these medical manoeuvres to save his ebbing life. He knew that he was dying and stated so confidently to the doctor. The brain within his weakened body still functioned with its customary clarity. Yet his exhausted heart would not serve him any longer. Just before dawn the dying writer drank his last glass of champagne and quietly departed this life forever without complaints, parting exhortations or farewells.

On July 3rd special bulletins with the latest news of the siege of Port Arthur included an additional telegram from Berlin announcing Chekhov's death.

On July 8th a zinc coffin containing Chekhov's body was brought to St. Petersburg. Relatives and friends of the deceased were waiting to accompany the writer on his last journey. The same day the coffin was escorted to Moscow where the funeral service was held on July 10th.

The funeral arrangements were quite out of keeping with Chekhov's character and his restrained style. Everything about the ceremony was highly formal and ostentatious. His friends were silent. The police, on their guard against possible anti-government demonstrations, forbade any speeches and kept a careful check on the requiem chants delivered before the building of the Arts Theatre and the Russkaya Mysl (Russian Thought) publishing house. The secret police made sure no public speeches were made. For the majority of the Muscovites the funeral of this famous writer meant little more than an entertaining spectacle or sensation of the moment. Gorky wrote about it to his wife Ekaterina Peshkova: "We had expected speeches would be made at the graveside, but there were hardly

any. Some of those present started demanding that Gorky be allowed to speak.... What kind of people they were ... I don't know." Idle gossipers started talking about deals made between Chekhov and Marx the publisher and Olga Knipper's salary. "All this brazen paltriness was inescapable. It was time for eloquent, sincere or sad words and no one came forward with them. It was all unbearably sad. Chaliapin broke into tears and started cursing...."

All the side-streets leading onto the route for the funeral procession were cordoned off, and students locked arms to ensure a safe passage for the coffin-bearers and mourners.

"When the funeral procession started to make its way through the narrow gates of the monastery such a scrum began that I was beside myself with horror," recalled the writer's brother Mikhail. "Shouts and groans were to be heard. At last the whole crowd pushed its way into the cemetery—crosses started cracking, tomb-stones and railings were knocked over and flowers trampled underfoot...."

The funeral almost turned into a farcical catastrophe. Yet there was something typically Chekhovian about it all the same. The writer's mother was there, and she was heard to express her mother's grief in simple words: "Our Antosha is no more."

Lydia Sanina was also in the crowd. She was saying good-bye to her youth, her early hopes, her first love, which, though hopeless, never died.

After the commotion of the funeral this woman who had loved Chekhov so devotedly, made her way to his house, where she had so often talked to him, to weep away her boundless sorrow.

Much later, in July 1906, Maria Chekhova wrote to her, saying: "... It is you with whom I should wish to weep now, I cannot forget your tears at this time two years ago...."

Many years later Chekhov's sister was to note in her reminiscences: "I shall never forget how after Anton's funeral in Moscow Lika, dressed completely in black, came to our house and stood in silence for two whole hours by the window, not responding to any of the attempts to draw her into the conversation. The past and all that she had been through must have engulfed her gaze completely."

Those last years before Chekhov's death had separated the old friends. They had lived in different towns, stopped writing to each other and hardly ever met. Each had new circles of friends and new emotional experiences that preoccupied them. The early autumn of 1889, the house in Sadovaya-Kudrinskaya

street, Melikhovo and Braga's serenade—now all belonged to the distant past. Yet from those distant days there still echoed the leitmotif of love immortalised in Tchaikovsky's exultant song:

When I am with her the past holds no terror,  
My heart to the old love awakens anew....  
Faith, inspiration and dreams in full measure,  
All I hold sacred, my soul's dearest treasure,  
All are from you.

Lines such as these evoked passages from the famous symphonic fantasies such as *The Tempest*, *Francesca da Rimini*, *Romeo and Juliet*. All of them proclaimed the timeless theme of world poetry: love's triumph over death. Such was to have been the theme of Chekhov's last play and Lika Mizinova brought love like this to his grave-side.

### Epilogue

This sad event of 1904 found the heroine of this story at the very middle of her life's road. She was just thirty-four at the time and was destined to live almost as long again, but in the creative world of her husband's art.

The inconspicuous yet important work carried out by this "producer's assistant", whom life itself had promoted to this modest yet fascinating office, fused as one Lika's life and the stage productions of her tireless husband. A concert grand stood in Sanin's study on which the singer, who had once taken part in many a Melikhovo *Lieder Abend*, now performed arias and other opera parts. But now it was no longer a dilettante proffering romances or accompanying amateur tenors, but serious work in preparation for operatic performances in the world's leading opera-houses.

In 1909 Sanin was engaged to put on Russian operas abroad, and soon he was to produce *Prince Igor* and *The Maiden of Pskov* in Paris and London, and *Boris Godunov* in Lyons. He also staged foreign plays in France, namely, Verhaeren's *Helen of Sparta* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. All these works proved a tremendous success and made their producer world famous. These achievements also represented important events in the life of Sanin's first helpmate.

In 1913 Sanin was invited to Moscow's Free Theatre sponsored by Konstantin Mardzhanov to put on Moussorgsky's *Sorochintsy Fair* based on Gogol's story. Maria Ermolova spoke ecstatically about it in her letter to Sanin of October 9, 1913.

After 1917 Sanin started working again at the Moscow Arts Theatre and soon afterwards also staged *Wit Works Woe*, Ostrovsky's *Forest* and *Richard III* with Alexander Yuzhin in the title-role and *Maria Stuart* with Vera Pashennaya at the Maly Theatre. In 1925 Maria Ermolova wrote to Yuzhin, suggesting that Sanin should be invited to come and work at the Maly Theatre on a permanent basis.

At that period, while he was working in Moscow, the well-known producer was also to engage in work as a screen-director. In 1918 the *Rus* company invited him to direct a film based on Evgeny Chirikov's *Volga Legends*. The critics noted the truthfulness and emotional involvement of his creative approach, his unending energy and remarkable ability for mobilising the potential of his cast. Lunacharsky\* was to write of that film: "It is undoubtedly the most splendid and most artistic production among Russian films made so far." With the same team Sanin was soon afterwards to direct screen versions of Tolstoi's *Polikushka* starring Ivan Moskvina, and Herzen's *Magpie* starring Olga Gzovskaya.

The author of the book *Background to the Early Soviet Cinema and the Moscow Arts Theatre* M.N. Aleinikov, who had a good deal to do with director Sanin as head of the *Mezhrabprom Rus* film company, informed me in the spring of 1959 that Sanin had continued his work in the theatre during the twenties in Paris and also for a time in Milan, where he had produced Moussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* at La Scala in 1926. At the end of the twenties he was invited to Moscow to make a film of *War and Peace* but the project never materialised: by that time Sanin was suffering from a serious mental illness.

Lika Mizinova's years of happiness were at an end. Her husband was placed in a psychiatric hospital where he was to spend a long period.

Lydia Sanina wrote to Aleinikov that one fine morning, with no warning at all, her ill husband came to his senses, recognised her, burst into tears, regained command of his mental faculties and went back to live at home again. He even started doing a little work.

In the 1930s Lydia Sanina herself fell ill (it would appear with heart trouble). When the Moscow Arts Theatre was on tour in Paris in 1937, the old friend of the family Vassili Kachalov

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\* Lunacharsky, A. V. (1875–1933)—prominent member of the Bolshevik Party, People's Commissar for Education after the Revolution of 1917.—Ed.

tried to visit the couple. Yet Lika could not bring herself to face Kachalov, ravaged as she was then by disease, and received only his wife Nina Litovtseva.

Soon after that Lydia's condition deteriorated considerably. The following episode was recounted in the press by the writer Boris Zaitsev: "In 1937 I had occasion to visit a friend in a hospital in the rue Didot. She was lying in a small ward partitioned off from the general ward with panes of glass. Next to her little ward was another, also partitioned off with glass, where another woman was lying.

" 'Do you know who that is?' my friend asked me.

" 'No.'

" 'That's Chekhov's *Seagull*, now married to the producer Sanin. I got to know her here. She is seriously ill.'

"Later that same year Lydia Sanina was to die."

The figures of many celebrities from the art world may have flitted through the memory of this dying woman in that hospital in the rue Didot—Chaliapin, Levitan, Stanislavsky, Rakhmaninov, Vrubel, Kachalov.... Yet the written records bearing upon her life, which have been handed down to us, justify the assumption that this world of great artists was dominated in Lika's mind by that subtlest of poets and dramatists who by that time had already won the hearts of countless readers and theatre-goers in Europe, America, Japan and China, indeed, in all those countries where his play was staged, which told the story of the seagull-heroine with the wounded wing who longed to soar sunwards.

## MAXIM GORKY

Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) is a writer whose name needs no introduction regardless of the language it appears in. His novels *Mother*, *The Artamonovs*, *The Life of Klim Samgin* and the plays *The Lower Depths*, *Enemies* and others, as well as his numerous stories, have long since been acknowledged as classics.

Gorky has left us, besides his other works of fiction, a number of splendid literary portraits. Even before the revolution of 1917, Gorky conceived a plan for publishing a large series of biographies of prominent figures from the world of culture. His idea was to draw into this undertaking the world's leading writers and scholars. When approaching Romain Rolland with a request that he should write a biography of Beethoven for young people, Gorky wrote: "Our aim is to impart to young people love for life and faith in it. We want to teach people to be heroic. It is necessary that man should understand that he is the creator and the master of the world, that he is responsible for all misfortune on earth, and also that it is to him that credit is due for all that is good in life."

Gorky embodied these ideas in his remarkable literary portraits of outstanding figures in the Russian Revolution and some of the world's major writers.

This collection includes a literary portrait of Lev Tolstoi, who, as Gorky said, "was the most complex of all the great men of the nineteenth



century". Konstantin Fedin recalled his first reading of this work by Gorky in the following words: "With every gulp I became ever more intoxicated and conscious, as though in a trance, of the presence of two men in the room; one of whom I knew personally, and the other whom I had only heard about before. These two men were talking to each other, without noticing me, and their conversation was extremely disjointed, motley, momentarily even terrible; it filled my soul now with rapture, now with trepidation, and at times it was infectiously gay.... Had I been asked at that moment if I had ever met Tolstoi in real life I would have answered without hesitation: 'Yes I have. He came to visit me in Peski with young Gorky.' "

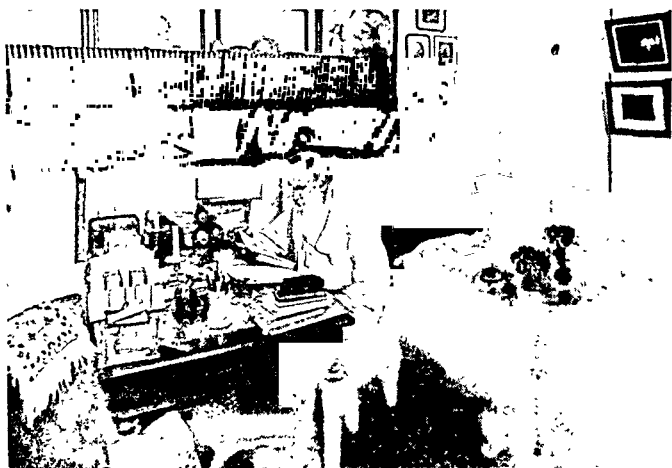
Adel T. Faenmi



*Lev. Tolstoi. Oil painting by I. Kramskoi. 1873*



Sofia Tolstaya. Oil painting by V. Serov. 1892



Lev Tolstoi in his study in Yasnaya Polyana. Photograph.  
1908



Lev Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky in Yasnaya Polyana.  
Photograph. 1900



Lev Tolstoi behind the plough. Oil painting by I. Repin.  
1887



Lev Tolstoy and Ilya Repin in Yasnaya Polyana. Photograph. 1908





## LEV TOLSTOI

*This book is composed of random notes made by me when living in Oleiz, Lev Tolstoi then being in Gaspra, at first seriously ill, later recuperating from his illness. I considered these notes, jotted down carelessly on all sorts of scraps of paper, as lost, but lately discovered some of them. I have included also an unfinished letter written by me under the impression of Tolstoi's "departure" from Yasnaya Polyana, and his death. I give the letter exactly as it was written, without altering a word. And I have not finished it, for I cannot.*

### Notes

#### I

Clearly the idea that destroys his peace of mind more frequently than any other, is the idea of God. Sometimes this seems to be not an idea, but a tense resistance to something by which he feels he is dominated. He does not speak about it as much as he would like to, but thinks about it continually. I don't think this is a sign of age, or due to a presentiment of death, more likely it comes from a fine human pride. A little from a sense of injury, too, perhaps—that he, Lev Tolstoi, must shamefully submit to the will of some streptococcus. If he were a naturalist, he would undoubtedly have created brilliant hypotheses, made great discoveries.

His hands are marvellous—ugly, disfigured by swollen veins, and yet extraordinarily expressive, full of creative force. Probably Leonardo da Vinci had hands like that. Anything could be done by such hands. Sometimes, when talking, he moves his fingers, gradually flexing and suddenly unflexing them, while uttering some splendid weighty word. He is like a god, not a Sabaoth or a god from Olympus, but like some Russian god, “seated on a throne of maple wood, beneath a golden lime-tree,” and though he may not be so very majestic, perhaps he is more cunning than all the other gods.

He has an almost feminine tenderness for Sulerzhitsky\*. For Chekhov he has a paternal affection, the pride of the creator may be felt in this love, but his feeling for Suler is tenderness, unceasing interest, and an admiration which never seems to weary the wizard. There may be something a little absurd in this feeling, like the love of an old maid for her parrot, her pug, or her puss. Suler is like some wondrous free bird from a strange, unknown land. A hundred such people as he would be capable of changing the face and the soul of some provincial town. Its face they would shatter, its soul they would imbue with a passion for restless, defiant genius. It is easy and pleasant to love Suler, and when I see how women neglect him, I am astonished and furious. But perhaps there is cleverly concealed caution beneath this neglect. There is no depending on Suler. What will he be up to tomorrow? Perhaps he'll throw a bomb, or join a choir of tavern singers. There is enough energy in him for three eras. He has so much of the fire of life in him that he seems to sweat sparks, like a red-hot iron.

But once he was very angry with Suler—Leopold (Sulerzhitsky.—*Tr.*), always inclined to anarchy, was fond of arguing hotly about the freedom of the individual, and L.N. always made fun of him when he did this.

I remember Sulerzhitsky once got hold of a slender pamphlet by Prince Kropotkin and, roused to enthusiasm by it,

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\* Sulerzhitsky L. A. (1872–1916)—writer and artist, from 1905 producer at the Moscow Arts Theatre.—*Ed.*

held forth the whole day to all and sundry on the wisdom of anarchy, philosophising in the most excruciating manner.

"Oh, stop it, Lyovushka, I'm tired of it!" said L. N. crossly. "You're like a parrot repeating the one word—freedom, freedom, and what does it really mean? Supposing you were to get freedom in your sense of the word, as you conceive it—what would be the result? Philosophically speaking—a bottomless void, while in life, in practice, you would become an idler, a mendicant. If you were free according to your conception, what would there be to bind you to life, to human beings? Look—the birds are free, but they build nests. You would not go in for building a nest, you would just satisfy your sexual instincts wherever you found yourself, like a tom-cat. Only think seriously for a moment and you will see, you will feel, that in the ultimate sense of the word freedom is a void, a vacuum, mere formless space."

Knitting his brows angrily, he paused for a moment and added more gently:

"Christ was free, and so was Buddha, and they both took on themselves the sins of the world, voluntarily entered the prison of earthly life. And nobody has ever gone further than that—nobody! You and I—what have we done? We all seek freedom from our duty to our neighbour, although it is precisely this sense of duty which has made human beings of us, and but for this sense of duty we should live like the animals...."

He chuckled.

"And yet we are now arguing about how to live nobly. Not much comes from this, but at the same time not a little. Look! You argue with me till you are black in the face, but you don't strike me, you don't even swear at me. If you really felt yourself to be free, you would slaughter me—that's all."

And after another pause, he added:

"Freedom—that would mean that everything and everyone agree with me, but then I would no longer exist, for we are only conscious of ourselves in conflict and opposition."

#### 4

Goldenweiser played Chopin, drawing the following thoughts from Lev Nikolayevich:

"Some German princeling said: 'If you would have slaves, you must compose as much music as possible.' This is a just

reflection, a faithful observation—music dulls the mind. No one understands this so well as the Catholics—our spiritual fathers could never reconcile themselves to Mendelssohn in the church, of course. A Tula priest assured me that Christ himself was not a Jew, although he was the son of a Hebrew god and his mother was a Hebrew woman. He admitted this, but nevertheless declared: 'It is impossible.' 'What then?' I asked him. He shrugged his shoulders and said: 'This is a mystery to me.'"

## 5

"If anyone was an intellectual, it was Prince Vladimirkó of Galich. As long ago as the 12th century he was daring enough to say: 'The time for miracles has passed.' Since then six hundred years have elapsed, and the intellectuals keep on assuring one another: 'There are no miracles.' But the people believe in miracles just as they used to in the 12th century."

## 6

"The minority need God because they have everything else, the majority, because they have nothing."

Or rather I would say: the majority believe in God out of cowardice, and only a few from fulness of soul.\*

"Do you like Hans Andersen's fairy-tales?" he asked thoughtfully. "I did not understand them when they were published in Marko Vovchok's translation, but ten years later I picked up the book and read them again, and suddenly I realised quite clearly that Hans Andersen was a lonely man. Very lonely. I know nothing about his life. He was a confirmed rake and wanderer, I believe, but that only strengthens my conviction that he was a lonely man. And therefore he turned to the children, believing (but this was an error) that children have more compassion for others than grown-ups have. Children pity no one, they don't know what pity means."

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\* To avoid misinterpretation I would state that I regard religious writings as purely literary; the lives of Buddha, Christ Mahomed, as imaginative fiction.—*Auth.*

## 7

He advised me to read the Buddhist Catechism. There is always something sentimental in the way he talks about Christ and Buddhism—there is neither enthusiasm nor pathos in his words, not a single spark of the heart's fire. I think he considers Christ naive, worthy of pity, and though he admires him in some ways, it is unlikely that he loves him. And he seems to be afraid that if Christ were to come to a Russian village the girls would laugh at him.

## 8

Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, who seems to be a clever man, was there today. His bearing is modest, and he does not say much. He has nice eyes and a good figure. His gestures are restrained. L. N. smiled at him, talking sometimes in French, sometimes in English. In Russian he said:

"Karamzin wrote for the tsar, Solovyov wrote lengthily and tediously, and Klyuchevsky wrote for his own pleasure. He was a deep one, at first you think he is praising, but when you look deeper, you realise he is cursing."

Someone mentioned Zabelin.

"Very nice. A kind of petty official. A lover of antiques, he collects everything, indiscriminately. He describes food as if he had never had enough to eat. But he's very, very amusing."

## 9

He reminds one of those pilgrims, who pace the earth, their staves in their hands, their whole lives, covering thousands of miles from monastery to monastery, from shrine to shrine, terribly homeless, alien to everyone and everything. The world is not for them—nor God, either. They pray to Him from habit, but in their secret hearts they hate Him: why does He drive them over the world, to the ends of the earth—why? They regard human beings as mere stumps, roots, stones lying in the road—one stumbles over them, and sometimes hurts oneself

against them. One could do without them, but it is sometimes pleasant to astonish people by one's unlikeness to them, to flaunt one's disagreement with them.

## 10

"Frederick the Great said a clever thing: 'Everyone must save his soul *à sa façon*.' And it was he who said: 'Think what you like, but obey.' Dying, he admitted: 'I am weary of ruling slaves.' The so-called great are always extremely self-contradictory. This is forgiven them, along with all sorts of other follies. But after all, to contradict oneself is not folly: a fool is stubborn, but never contradicts himself. Yes, Frederick was a queer man—the Germans regarded him as their best emperor, and yet he could not bear them, he did not even like Goethe and Wieland...."

## 11

"Romanticism is the fear of looking truth in the eyes," he said last night, speaking of Balmont's poems. Suler did not agree with him, and read some of them with great feeling, lisping in his agitation.

"That's not poetry, Lyovushka, it's charlatanism, nonsense, mere senseless word-spinning. Poetry is artless. When Fet wrote:

I do not know myself what I shall sing

I only know, a song comes now to ripeness....

he expressed the true feeling of the people about poetry. The muzhik, too, knows not what he sings; he just sings oh! and ah! and ai-da-mi! and out comes a true song, straight from the soul, as the birds sing. Your new poets do nothing but invent. You know there are idiotic things called '*articles de Paris*', and that's what your poetasters are busy making. Nekrasov did nothing but invent his doggerel."

"What about Béranger?" asked Suler.

"Béranger's different. What have we and the French in common? They are hedonists—the life of the soul is not so important for them as the life of the flesh. The most important thing for a Frenchman is woman. They are a worn-out, bedraggled nation. The doctors say all consumptives are sensualists."

Suler started arguing with his usual outspokenness, spluttering out a multitude of words at random. L. N. looked at him, and said, smiling broadly:

"Today you're as peevish as a young lady ripe for marriage, when there's no suitor in sight...."

## 12

His illness has dried him up, has burned up something within him, and he seems to have become lighter, more transparent, more adapted to life, inwardly. His eyes have become keener, his glance more penetrating. He listens attentively and seems to be remembering something long forgotten, or waiting confidently for something new, hitherto unknown. At Yasnaya Polyana he had appeared to me like a man who knew all there was to know, who had found answers to all his questions.

## 13

If he were a fish his home would certainly be the ocean, he would never swim in inland seas, still less in rivers. Small fry are darting around; what he says cannot interest them, they do not need it, and his silence does not frighten them or affect them in any way. And he knows how to be silent very imposingly and ably, like a real hermit. True, he speaks a great deal on the subjects that obsess him, but one feels there is still more that he does not say. There are things he cannot say to anybody. He probably has thoughts which he fears.

## 14

Someone sent him an amusing version of the story of the boy baptised by Christ. He read the story to Suler and Chekhov with great gusto—read it wonderfully! He was particularly amused by the way the imps tormented the landowners, and there was something in this which I did not quite like. He is incapable of insincerity, but if this is sincere, so much the worse.

Then he said:

"Look how well the muzhiks tell stories. Everything is simple, few words, and lots of feeling. True wisdom is always laconical—like 'Lord have mercy upon us.' "

But it is a ferocious story.



His interest in me is ethnographical. For him I am a member of a tribe of which he knows very little—nothing more.

I read him my story *The Bull*. He laughed a great deal and praised me for knowing "the tricks of language".

"But you don't know how to use words, all your muzhiks express themselves very grandly. In real life muzhiks speak stupidly, awkwardly, at first you can't tell what they're trying to say. That's done on purpose, the desire to lead the other man on is always concealed beneath the apparent stupidity of their words. A true muzhik never shows what's on his mind straight-away, that wouldn't suit him. He knows people approach a stupid person simply and guilelessly, and that's just what he wants. You stand revealed before him, he sees all your weak spots at once. He is mistrustful, he is afraid to tell his secret thoughts even to his wife. But in your stories everything is straightforward, there is a collection of wisecracks in every story. And they speak in aphorisms, that's not right, either—aphorisms do not suit the Russian language."

"And what about proverbs, sayings?"

"That's different. They weren't invented the day before yesterday."

"You yourself often speak in aphorisms."

"Never! And then you try to embellish everything—people and nature, especially people. Leskov did, too, he was high-flown and affected, people have long stopped reading him. Don't give in to anyone, don't be afraid of anyone—then you'll be all right...."

I was struck by a strange saying in the diary he gave me to read: "God is my desire."

When I returned it to him today, I asked him what he meant.

"An unfinished thought," he said, screwing up his eyes as he looked at the page. "I must have wanted to say—God is my desire to grasp what He is.... No, not that...." He laughed, rolled

the notebook and thrust it into the wide pocket of his smock. His relations with God are indefinite, sometimes they remind me of "two bears in one lair".

## 18

On science.

"Science is a gold ingot concocted by a charlatan-alchemist. You want to simplify it, to make it comprehensible to everyone—in other words, to coin any amount of false money. When the people realise the true value of this money they will not thank you for it."

## 19

We were walking in Yusupov Park. He discoursed brilliantly on the morals of the Moscow aristocracy. A big Russian wench was working almost doubled over on a flower-bed, showing her elephantine legs, her enormous, heavy breasts shaking. He looked at her attentively.

"All this splendour and extravagance was supported by caryatides like that. Not merely by the work of muzhiks and peasant wenches, not by quit rent, but literally by the blood of the people. If the aristocracy had not from time to time coupled with mares like this, it would long ago have died out. Strength cannot be expended, as it was by the young men of my day, with impunity. But after sowing their wild oats many of them married peasant lasses and produced good offspring. So here, too, the muzhik strength came to the rescue. It comes in handy everywhere. That's the way it ought to be done—that one half of the gentry should spend its vitality on their own kind and the other half mix its blood with the thick blood of the country people, so as to dilute it a little, too. That's good for the race."

## 20

He is very fond of talking about women, like a French novelist, but always with that coarseness of the Russian muzhik which used to grate on my ears. Walking in the almond copse today, he asked Chekhov:

"Were you very dissipated in your youth?"

A. P. smiled sheepishly and muttered something, tugging at his beard, and Tolstoi admitted, looking out to sea:

"I was an indefatigable —"

He said this regretfully, using a salty country word at the end of the sentence. And I noticed for the first time that he uttered this word quite simply, as if he knew no worthy substitute for it. And all such words sound quite simple and ordinary, coming from his bearded lips, losing in their passage their soldier-like coarseness and filth. I recall my first meeting with him and what he said to me about *Varenka Olesova*, and *Twenty-Six Men and One Girl*. From the ordinary point of view his speech was a stream of "obscenities". I was taken aback and even offended, believing that he considered me incapable of understanding any other sort of language. Now I see it was foolish of me to have been offended.

## 21

He was sitting on a stone bench beneath the cypresses, shrivelled, small, grey, and yet like a Sabaoth, a little weary and trying to distract himself by imitating the warbling of a finch. The bird was singing in the dark-green foliage, and Tolstoi was peering into the leaves, narrowing his small, keen eyes, thrusting out his lips like a baby and whistling tunelessly.

"The little thing is working itself into a frenzy! Just listen to it! What bird is it?"

I spoke about the finch and the jealousy of these birds.

"Only one song their whole life long—and jealous! Man has hundreds of songs in his heart, and he is blamed for giving way to jealousy—is that fair?" he said thoughtfully, as if asking himself the question. "There are moments when a man tells a woman more about himself than she ought to know. Afterwards he forgets he has told her, but she remembers. Perhaps jealousy comes from the fear of lowering oneself, the fear of being humiliated and appearing ridiculous. It's not the wench who takes hold of your—who is dangerous, but the one who takes hold of the soul."

When I said that there was something inconsistent with the *Kreutzer Sonata* in this, a radiant smile spread all over his beard. "I'm not a finch," he answered.

While walking in the evening he suddenly said:

"A man goes through earthquakes, epidemics, the horrors of disease, and all sorts of spiritual torments, but the most agonising tragedy he ever knows always has been and always will be—the tragedy of the bedroom."

He brought this out with a triumphant smile—sometimes he has the broad, serene smile of a man who has overcome something excessively difficult or who has long been suffering from a gnawing pain which suddenly vanishes. Every thought burrows into his soul like a tick. He either pulls it out at once or allows it to suck its fill, till it falls off of itself, replete.

Another time, in the middle of an absorbing discourse on stoicism he suddenly frowned, clucked, and said sternly:

"Quilted, not stitched...."

These words had obviously not the slightest reference to the philosophy of the stoics. Observing my astonishment he said rapidly, nodding towards the door leading into the next room: "They keep saying—'a stitched counterpane.'"

And then he went on: "That Renan ... sugary chatterbox."

He often told me: "You relate things well—in your own words, with conviction, not bookishly."

But he almost always noted carelessness in speech, saying under his breath, as if to himself:

"Uses a good Russian word, and then a word like 'absolutely',\* in the same sentence."

Sometimes he would chide me: "You combine words which are utterly different in spirit—never do that!"

His sensitiveness to the forms of speech seemed to me sometimes morbidly acute. Once he said:

"I came across the words 'cat' and 'guts' in the same sentence in a book—revolting! It almost made me sick."

"I can't bear philologists," he would say, "they're all dry-as-dust scholars, but there is a great work on language before them. We use words we do not understand. We have no idea of the way in which many of our verbs have come into being."

He was fond of speaking of Dostoyevsky's language:

"He wrote abominably, he made his style ugly on purpose—on purpose, I'm sure, out of affectation. He loved to show off—in *The Idiot* you will find the words 'cheek', 'swank', 'ostentatious familiarity', all jumbled together. I think he

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\* Tolstoi refers to the word "absolutno", in which the Russian adverbial ending "no" is tacked onto a foreign word.—Tr.

enjoyed mixing up colloquial Russian words with words of foreign derivation. But you will find unpardonable lapses in his writing. The Idiot says: 'The ass is a worthy and useful person', but nobody laughs, although these words could not fail to arouse laughter, or at least some remark. He says this in front of three sisters who loved to make fun of him, especially Aglaya. The book is considered bad, but its chief blemish is that Prince Mishkin is an epileptic. If he were a healthy man his genuine naiveté, his purity of heart would touch us deeply. But Dostoyevsky had not the courage to make him a healthy man. Besides, he didn't like healthy people. He was convinced that, since he was himself a sick man, the whole world was sick...."

He read Suler and me a version of the scene of the fall of Father Sergius—a ruthless scene. Suler pouted and wriggled in his excitement.

"What's the matter? Don't you like it? " asked L.N.

"It's really too cruel, it's just like Dostoyevsky. That putrid girl, and her pancake-like breasts, and all that! Why couldn't he have sinned with a beautiful, healthy woman? "

"That would have been a sin with no justification—this way his pity for the girl could be pleaded—nobody else would take her, poor thing."

"I don't understand...."

"You don't understand a great deal, Lyovushka, there's no guile in you...."

The wife of Andrei Lvovich came in and the conversation was broken off, and when she and Suler went to the annex L. N. said to me:

"Lyovuska is the purest man I know. He's like that himself—if he does wrong, it's out of pity for someone."

## 22

His favourite subjects of conversation are God, the peasant, and woman. Of literature he speaks seldom and little, as if it were an alien subject to him. And his attitude to women, as far as I can see, is one of obstinate hostility. There is nothing he likes so much as to punish them—unless they are just ordinary women like Kitty and Natasha Rostova. Is it the revenge of a man who has not obtained as much happiness as he was capable of, or an enmity of the spirit towards the "humiliating impulses of the flesh"? Whatever it is, it is hostility, and very bitter, as in *Anna Karenina*. He talked very well of the "humiliating

impulses of the flesh" on Sunday, discussing Rousseau's *Confessions* with Chekhov and Yelpatyevsky. Suler jotted down his words, but later, while making coffee, burned his notes in the flame of the spirit lamp. Before that, he had burned L.N.'s remarks about Ibsen, and lost his notes on the symbolism of marriage rites, about which L.N. had made some extremely pagan comments, here and there coinciding with those of V.V. Rozanov.

## 23

Some Stundists\* from Feodosia were here this morning, and all day he has been talking enthusiastically about muzhiks.

At lunch he said:

"You should have seen them—both so robust and sturdy. One of them said: 'We have come unbidden,' and the other: 'May we leave unchidden!' " And he fairly shook with childish laughter.

After lunch, on the verandah:

"We shall soon stop understanding the language of the people altogether. Now we speak of the 'theory of progress', 'the role of the individual in history', the 'evolution of science', 'dysentery', and the muzhik says: 'It's no use looking for a needle in a haystack,' and all the theories, and history and evolution become useless, ridiculous, because the muzhik does not understand them, does not require them. But the muzhik is stronger than we are and has more staying power, and we may (who knows? ) share the fate of the Atsuri tribe, of whom some scholar was told: 'All the Atsuris perished, but there is still a parrot which knows a few words of their language.'"

## 24

"Woman is physically more sincere than man, but her thoughts are false. When she lies she does not believe herself, while Rousseau both lied and believed."

## 25

"Dostoyevsky wrote of one of his insane characters that all his life he punished himself and others because he had served

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\* A religious sect.—Ed.

that which he did not believe in. He wrote that about himself, or rather he could easily have said it about himself."

## 26

"Some Biblical sayings are extremely obscure—what, for example, do the words: 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof' mean? They have nothing to do with the Scriptures, they smack of popular-scientific materialism."

"You have commented on the sense of these words somewhere," said Suler.

"What if I have.... Sense there may be, but I didn't get to the bottom of it."

And he gave a cunning smile.

## 27

He loves to put sly, embarrassing questions:

"What do you think of yourself? "

"Do you love your wife? "

"Do you consider my son Lev talented? "

"Do you like Sofia Andreyevna? " \*

It is impossible to lie to him.

Once he asked:

"Do you love me, Alexei Maximovich? "

This is the playfulness of a Russian *bogatyr*\*\*—Vasily Buslayev, the Novgorod daredevil. He tries first one thing, then another, as if preparing for a fight. This is interesting, but I can't say I care for it. He is a devil, and I am still but an infant, he ought to let me alone.

## 28

Perhaps the muzhik is simply a bad smell for him, which he can never forget and feels compelled to talk about.

Last night I told him about my skirmish with the widow of General Cornet, and he laughed till he cried, laughed till it hurt, groaned and kept exclaiming in a shrill voice:

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\* His wife.—Tr.

\*\* Legendary Russian hero of gigantic stature and strength.—Ed.

"With a spade! On her—! With a spade, eh? Right on her—! Was it a big spade?"

Then, after a moment's pause, he said gravely:

"You were too kind—another man in your place would have bashed her over the head. Too kind. Did you understand she wanted you?"

"I don't remember. I don't think I did."

"Of course she did. It's perfectly obvious. Of course she did."

"That didn't interest me then."

"Never mind what interested you. You're not a ladies' man, that's obvious. Another man would have made his fortune by it, become a house-owner and caroused with her for the rest of his life."

After a pause:

"You're a queer chap! Don't be offended. You're very queer. And the funny thing is that you are good-natured, though you have a perfect right to be vindictive. Yes, you might have turned out vindictive. You're strong, that's very good...."

And, pausing once more, he added meditatively:

"I don't understand your mind. It's a very confused mind, but your heart is wise ... yes, you have a wise heart."

*NOTE:* When I lived in Kazan I worked as yardman and gardener for the widow of General Cornet. She was French, a fat young woman with spindly, schoolgirl legs. Her eyes were exceedingly beautiful, very restless, always wide open and avid-looking. I believe she had been a shopgirl or a cook before her marriage, perhaps even a *fille de joie*. She began drinking in the morning and would go out into the yard or the garden with nothing but a chemise under her orange-coloured dressing gown, in Tatar slippers of red morocco, her thick mane of hair pinned on the top of her head. It was very carelessly fastened and kept falling down her rosy cheeks and on to her shoulders. A young witch. She used to walk about the garden singing French songs, watching me work, and going up to the kitchen window every now and then and saying:

"Give me something, Pauline!"

"Something" was invariably one and the same thing—a glass of iced wine.

The three orphan Princesses D.-G. occupied the ground floor of the house, their father, a Commissary General, was always away, and their mother was dead. The widow had taken a dislike to the young ladies and did her best to make life miserable for them by playing all sorts of dirty tricks on them.



She spoke Russian badly, but could swear to a marvel, like a regular drayman. I was disgusted with the way she treated the poor girls—they were so mournful, so intimidated, so defenceless. Once, at about midday, two of them were walking about the garden, when suddenly the General's lady appeared, drunk as usual, and began shouting at them and driving them out of the garden. They started to go without a word, but Madame Cornet stood at the gate, barring the way with her person, and letting out a stream of imprecations in Russian fit to stagger a horse. I told her to stop swearing and let the girls pass, and she shouted:

"I know you! You get in at their window in the night...."

I lost my temper, took her by the shoulders and pushed her away from the gate, but she shook loose, turned her face towards me and yelled, suddenly throwing open her dressing-gown and lifting her chemise:

"I'm nicer than those skinny rats."

Then I lost my temper in good earnest, wheeled her round and hit her with my spade on her bottom, so that she rushed through the gate into the yard, exclaiming three times, in tremendous astonishment: "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

After this I got back my passport from her housekeeper Pauline, also a drunken wench, but extremely artful, took my bundle under my arm, and departed, while the General's lady, standing at the window with a red handkerchief in her hand, shouted after me:

"I won't call the police—never mind—listen! Come back! Don't be afraid...."

## 29

I asked him:

"Do you agree with Poznyshev that the doctors have killed and are still killing people by the hundred thousand?"

"And do you want to know very badly?"

"I do."

"Then I won't tell you."

And he chuckled, twiddling his thumbs.

I remember a comparison in one of his stories of a village horseleech and a medical practitioner:

"Aren't the words 'sap', 'haemorrhoids', 'bleed' simply other words for 'nerves', 'rheumatism', 'constitution', and so on?"

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And this after Jenner, Behring, Pasteur! There's an imp for you!

30

How strange that he should like playing cards. He plays in deadly earnest, and gets very excited. And he holds the cards as nervously as if he had a live bird between his fingers, and not just bits of cardboard.

31

"Dickens said a very wise thing: 'You hold your life on the condition that to the last you shall struggle hard for it.' On the whole he was a sentimental, garrulous writer, not very wise. But he could construct a novel like no one else, certainly a great deal better than Balzac. Somebody said: 'Many are obsessed with the passion for writing books, but few are ashamed of them.' Balzac wasn't, nor was Dickens, and they both wrote much that was bad. And yet Balzac was a genius, I mean he was that which can only be called a genius...." Somebody brought him Tikhomirov's *Why I Stopped Being a Revolutionary*\*—Lev Nikolayevich picked it up and brandished it, saying:

"Political murder is very well treated here, showing that this method of resistance has no clearly-defined purpose. Such an idea, says this reformed murderer, can never be anything but the anarchical despotism of the individual and contempt for society, for humanity. This is well said but the words 'anarchical despotism' are a misprint, he should have said 'monarchical'. The idea is good and true, all terrorists will trip on it, I am speaking of the honest ones. Anyone who naturally likes to kill will not trip. There is no stumbling-block for him here. He is just a murderer, and fell among the terrorists by chance...."

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\* This is a reference to the pamphlet by Lev Tikhomirov published in 1888. The author had in the past been a member of the Executive Committee of the People's Will party and taken part in attempts on the life of Alexander II but later became a rabid monarchist and earned "the pardon" of the tsarist government.—Ed.

Sometimes he is self-satisfied and intolerable, like a sectarian from the Volga region, and as he is a bell which resounds throughout the world, this is appalling. Yesterday he said to me:

"I'm more of a muzhik than you are, and can feel as the muzhiks do better than you."

My God! He shouldn't boast of this, he really shouldn't!

I read him some scenes from *The Lower Depths*. He listened attentively, and then asked:

"What made you write this?"

I explained as well as I was able to.

"You rush at things like a cockerel. And another thing—you are always trying to smooth over all the seams and cracks with your own colouring. Hans Andersen says in one of his stories: 'The gilt rubs off, but the leather remains.' Our muzhiks say: 'Everything passes, truth alone remains.' Better not daub, it'll be the worse for you afterwards. And then your language is too sprightly, full of tricks, that won't do. You must write more simply, the people always talk simply, they may sound disjointed at first, but they express themselves well. The muzhik does not ask: 'How is it that a third is greater than a fourth, when four is more than three?' as a certain learned young lady did. There is no need for trick writing."

He seemed to be displeased, obviously he did not like what I had read to him at all. After a pause he said in surly tones, looking past me:

"Your old man is unlovable, one doesn't believe in his goodness. The Actor's quite good. Have you read *The Fruits of Enlightenment*? I have a chef in it who is like your actor. Writing plays is very difficult. Your prostitute is good, too, some are like that, no doubt. Have you met that sort?"

"Oh, yes."

"One can see that. Truth always makes itself felt. But you speak too much from the author's point of view, your heroes are not real characters, they are all too much alike. You probably don't understand women, all your women are failures—every one. One doesn't remember them...."

Andrei Lvovich's wife came into the room to call us to tea. He rose and went out very quickly, as if glad to bring the conversation to an end.

## 34

"What is the most terrible dream you ever had?"

I seldom dream, and have difficulty in remembering my dreams, but two have remained in my memory, and I shall probably not forget them for the rest of my life.

Once I dreamed of a sickly, putrid sort of sky, greenish-yellow, with round, flat stars in it, rayless and lustreless, like sores on the body of a starving man. Reddish lightning was crawling amongst them against the putrid sky; the lightning was very like a serpent and whenever it touched a star, the star swelled into a sphere and burst soundlessly, leaving in its place a dark stain, like a puff of smoke, and disappearing instantly into the putrid, watery sky. And all the stars burst, one after another, the sky grew still darker and more terrible, and then seemed to mass together, seethed, and fell in fragments on my head, in a kind of watery jelly, while in the spaces between the fragments shone the polished black surface.

L.N. said:

"You must have been reading some scientific work on astronomy, that's what your nightmare comes from. And what was the other dream?"

The other dream: a snowy plain, flat as a sheet of paper, not a mound, not a tree, not a bush, only a twig discerned faintly here and there, sticking out of the snow. Across the snow of this lifeless desert there stretches from horizon to horizon a yellow strip of scarcely perceptible road, and a pair of grey felt boots stride slowly along it all by themselves.

He raised his shaggy, gnome-like brows and gazed attentively at me. After a pause, he said: "That's terrible. Did you really dream it—you didn't make it up? There's something a bit bookish about that, too."

And suddenly he seemed to lose his temper, and said surlily, severely, tapping on his knee with one finger:

"You don't drink, do you? And you don't look as if you had ever been given to drinking. And yet there's something bibulous in these dreams. There was a German writer called Hoffmann, and he had card tables running up and down the street and all that sort of thing—well, he was a toper—a

'calagolic', as learned coachmen say. Boots striding about all by themselves—that's really terrible. Even if you made it up—it's very good. Terrible!"

He suddenly smiled all over his beard, so that his very cheek-bones were irradiated.

"And imagine this: all of a sudden a card table comes running down Tverskaya Street—you know, with bentwood legs, its boards flapping, and chalk puffing out of it—you can even make out figures on the green baize. It has run away because some excisemen played vint on it night and day for three days running, and it couldn't stand any more."

He laughed, but he must have noticed that I was a little hurt by his want of faith in me.

"You're offended because your dreams seem bookish to me. Don't be offended, I know how one sometimes unconsciously makes up things which are so strange that one simply can't believe in them, and then one begins to think one must have dreamed them. An old landowner once told me he dreamed he was walking in a forest, and came out into the steppe and this is what he saw: two mounds on the steppe, and suddenly they turned into breasts and a black face rose up between them, with two moons for eyes, wall-eyed, you know, and he himself was standing between the legs of a woman, and there was a deep black abyss in front of him, sucking him in. After this his hair began to turn grey, his hands began to shake, and he went abroad to Dr. Kneipp, to take the waters. That was just the sort of dream a man like that ought to have—he was a debauchee."

He patted me on the shoulder.

"But you're not a drinker, and not a debauchee—how is it you have such dreams?"

"I don't know."

"We know nothing about ourselves."

He sighed, narrowed his eyes and added in lower tones:

"Nothing."

This evening when we were out walking, he took my arm and said:

"Boots walking—gruesome, eh? All by themselves—tippity-tippity—and the snow crunching beneath them. Yes, it's very good. Still you're very, very bookish. Don't be angry—but that's bad, you know, it'll be in your way."

I don't think I'm more bookish than he is, and just now he seems to me an extreme rationalist, whatever he says.

Sometimes it seems as if he had only just arrived from somewhere far away, where people think and feel differently, treat one another quite differently, don't even move as we do, and speak a different language. He sits in a corner, weary, grey, as if dusty with the dust of another soil, and he gazes earnestly at everyone with the eyes of an alien or a deaf mute.

Yesterday, before dinner, he came into the drawingroom looking just like that, as if he were far, far away, and then, sitting on the sofa in silence for a moment, suddenly said, swaying, rubbing his knees with the palms of his hands, and wrinkling up his face:

"That's not the end of it, no, no."

Some person, as stupid and serene as a flat-iron, asked him: "What d'you mean?"

He gazed at him steadily, bending over, and glancing out at the verandah, where Dr. Nikitin, Yelpatyevsky and I were sitting, asked us:

"What are you talking about?"

"About Pleve."

"Pleve ... Pleve ..." he repeated thoughtfully, pausing between the words as if he had never heard the name before, then he shook himself as a bird does and said, with a chuckle:

"Some nonsense has been running through my head ever since the morning. Someone told me of an inscription on a tombstone:

Beneath this stone Ivan Egoriev rests.

By trade a tanner, he soaked skins with zest

And laboured righteously, was kind of heart,

But now has died, leaving his wife no part

In his concern. He was not old and might

Have done much more if on Good Friday night

God had not taken him to dwell in heaven...

He fell silent and then, shaking his head, smiled faintly, and added:

"There's something very touching, something quite sweet in human stupidity—when it isn't malignant. There always is."

We were called to dinner.

"I don't like drunks, but I know people who get interesting after a glass or two, they acquire a wit, a beauty of thought, an aptness and an eloquence, which they do not have when they are sober. Then I am ready to bless wine."

Suler said he and Lev Nikolayevich were walking along Tverskaya Street, when Tolstoi noticed two cuirassiers in the distance. Their brass breastplates scintillating in the sunlight, their spurs jingling, they strode along in step as if they had grown together, and their faces shone, too, with the complacency of youth and strength.

Tolstoi began abusing them.

"What majestic stupidity! Nothing but animals trained under the lash...."

But when the cuirassiers had passed by he stood still, and following them with an affectionate glance, said admiringly:

"Aren't they beautiful, though! Ancient Romans, eh, Lyovushka? Strength, beauty—oh, my God! How splendid good looks are in a man—how splendid!"

He overtook me on the lower road, one very hot day. He was riding in the direction of Livadia, mounted on a quiet little Tatar horse. Grey, shaggy, in his mushroom-shaped hat of thin white felt, he was like a gnome.

He reined in his horse and spoke to me. I walked beside his stirrup, and mentioned among other things that I had just had a letter from V.G. Korolenko. Tolstoi wagged his beard angrily.

"Does he believe in God?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know the most important thing. He believes, but is ashamed of admitting it in front of atheists."

He spoke grumblingly, peevishly, narrowing his eyes angrily, I could see I was in his way, but when I made as if to leave him, he stopped me.

"What's the matter? I'm riding slowly."

And again growled out:

"Your Andreyev is afraid of the atheists too, but he believes in God too, and he is afraid of God."

At the border of the estate of Grand Duke A.M. Romanov, three of the Romanovs stood close together in the road,

talking—the owner of the Ai-Todor estate, Georgy, and another—Pyotr Nikolayevich, from Dyulber, I think—all fine, tall men. The road was barred by a one-horse carriage, and a saddle horse. Lev Nikolayevich could not pass. He bent a stern, exacting gaze on the Romanovs. But they turned their backs to us. The saddle horse shifted its feet and moved aside, letting Tolstoi's horse pass.

After riding on for a minute or two in silence, he said:

"They recognised me, the boors!"

And a minute later:

"The horse knew it must make way for Tolstoi."

### 38

"Look after yourself, first and foremost for your own sake, then you will be doing plenty for others."

### 39

"What do we mean when we say we 'know'? I know I'm Tolstoi, a writer, I have a wife, children, grey hair, an ugly face, a beard—all that's in my passport. But they don't enter the soul in passports, all I know about my soul is that it craves nearness to God. But what is God? That of which my soul is a particle. That's all. Anyone who has learned to think finds it hard to believe, but one can only live in God through faith. Tertullian said: 'Thought is evil.' "

### 40

Despite the monotonousness of his preachings, this incredible man is boundlessly versatile.

While talking to the mullah of Gaspra in the park today, he held himself like a trustful country bumpkin for whom the hour to think of his last days had struck. Small as he actually was, he seemed to be trying to make himself still shorter, and standing beside the strong, sturdy Tatar, he looked like a little old man who had only just begun to meditate over the meaning of life and was overwhelmed by the problems it presented. Raising his shaggy brows in surprise, his keen eyes blinking timidly, he dimmed their intolerable, penetrating brilliance. His searching



gaze rested motionless on the mullah's broad face, and the pupils of his eyes lost the keenness that people found so disconcerting. He asked the mullah "childish" questions about the meaning of life, the soul and God, capping stanzas from the Koran with stanzas from the New Testament and the prophets with remarkable dexterity. In reality he was play-acting, and that with an extraordinary skill only possible to a great artist and sage.

And a few days ago, talking to Taneyev and Suler about music, he fell into childish raptures over its beauty, and you could see he enjoyed his own raptures—or rather his ability to feel them. He said no one had written so well and so profoundly about music as Schopenhauer, and while he was about it, told a funny story about Fet, and called music "the dumb prayer of the soul".

"Why dumb?" questioned Suler.

"Because it has no words. There is more soul in sounds than in thoughts. Thought is a purse containing copper coins, sound is unsmirched by anything, inwardly pure."

He used touching childish words with evident enjoyment, suddenly recalling the best and tenderest of them. And then, smiling in his beard, he said softly, almost caressingly:

"All musicians are stupid people; the more talented a musician, the more narrow-minded he is. And, strange to say, they are almost all religious."

## 41

To Chckhov, on the telephone:

"Today is such a delightful day for me, I feel so happy that I want you to be happy too. Especially you! You're so nice, so very nice!"

## 42

He does not listen to or believe people when they say the wrong thing. As a matter of fact he does not ask, he interrogates. Like a collector of rarities he only accepts what will not spoil the harmony of his collection.

Going through the mail:

"They make a great noise, they write, and when I die—they'll say, a year after: 'Tolstoi? Wasn't that the Count who went in for shoe-making, and then something or other happened to him?' "

More than once I caught on his face and in his glance the sly, satisfied smile of a man who has suddenly come upon a thing he had hidden. He hid something and then forgot the place. For many days he lived in secret anxiety, wondering persistently: where can I have put this thing I need so much? And he feared people would notice his anxiety, his loss, and do something unpleasant, something he would not like. And suddenly he remembers, and finds it. Filled with joy, and no longer bothering to conceal it, he looks slyly at everyone, as if saying:

"You can't hurt me now!"

But he says not a word of what he has found, and where he found it.

One never stops marvelling at him, but one would not care to see him too often, and I could never live in the same house—not to mention the same room—with him. Being with him is like being on a plain where everything has been burned up by the sun, and where even the sun is burning itself out, threatening endless dark night.

### *The Letter*

Just after I posted a letter to you, came the telegram announcing "the flight of Tolstoi". And as you see I am writing again, while I still feel in mental contact with you.

No doubt everything I feel inclined to say in connection with this news will be muddled, perhaps even harsh and uncharitable—you must forgive me—I feel as if someone had seized me by the throat and was strangling me.

He talked to me a great deal and at length. When I lived at Gaspra, in the Crimea, I often went to see him, and he was fond of visiting me, too. I read his books with earnest attention and

with love, so it seems to me that I have a right to say what I think about him, even if this is very bold of me, and if what I say runs counter to the common opinion of him. I know as well as anyone else that there never was a man more deserving of being called a genius, more complicated and self-contradictory, and more splendid in every way, yes—in every way. He is splendid both in the specific and broad sense, in a way which can hardly be put into words at all. There is something in him which always arouses in me the desire to shout to all and sundry: look what a marvellous man there is living on our planet! For he is, so to say, all-embracing, first and foremost a human being—a man in the true sense of the word.

But I have always been repelled by his stubborn, tyrannical efforts to turn the life of Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoi into the "life of the Saintly Father Lev". He has been working himself up to "suffer" for a long time, you know. He told Yevgeny Solovyov and Suler how sorry he was that he had not so far brought this off—he did not want to suffer simply from a natural desire to test the strength of his will, but with an obviously—I repeat it—stubborn intention to increase the weight of his doctrines, to make his preaching irresistible, to sanctify it in the eyes of men by suffering, and to compel them to accept it—to compel them, you understand. For he knows very well that his preaching is not convincing enough. When his diaries are published you will see some fine specimens of scepticism, applied by him to his own teaching and his personality. He knows that "martyrs and sufferers are almost invariably tyrants and oppressors"—he knows everything. And yet he says: "If I were to suffer for my ideas they would create quite a different impression." This has always repelled me in him, for I cannot help feeling in it an attempt to coerce me, the desire to dominate my conscience, to dazzle it with the sight of a martyr's blood, to place round my neck the yoke of dogmas.

He has always and everywhere sung paeans to immortality in the next world, but immortality in this world would be more to his taste. A national writer in the truest sense of the word, he embodies in his great soul all the bad qualities of the nation, all the mutilation inflicted on us by the tortures of our history.... Everything in him is national, and his whole preaching is mere reaction, atavism, that which we were beginning to shake off, to overcome.

Remember his letter, "The Intellectuals, the State, the People", written in 1905\*—what an unpleasant, spiteful thing that was! All through it can be detected the spiteful "I told you so!" of the dissenter. I wrote him a reply at the time, based on his own words to me, that he had "long forfeited the right to speak about the Russian people, and in their name", for I have been a witness of his unwillingness to listen to and understand the people who came to have a heart-to-heart talk with him. My letter was harsh, and I did not post it.

And he is now making what is probably his last leap in the hope of giving his ideas the highest possible significance. Like Vassily Buslayev he has always been fond of such leaps, but always towards the confirmation of his own sanctity and his searchings for a halo. This smacks of the Inquisition, though his teachings are justified by the ancient history of Russia and the personal sufferings of genius. Sanctity is to be attained through the contemplation of sin and the enslavement of the will to live....

There is much in Lev Nikolayevich that has often aroused in me feelings akin to hatred, much that falls like a heavy burden on my soul. His inordinately swollen ego is a monstrous phenomenon, almost abnormal, there is in it something of the Bogatyr Svyatogor, whose weight the earth could not support. Yes, he is great! I am profoundly convinced that, besides all of which he speaks, there is much about which he is silent—even in his own diaries—and about which he will probably never speak to a soul. This "something" only makes itself felt occasionally, tentatively, in his talk, and hints of it are to be found in the two diaries he gave me and L.A. Sulerzhitsky to read. It seems to me something like a "denial of all that has been said"—the most profound and arrant nihilism which has sprung up and developed on the soil of infinite despair and loneliness, which nothing has ever been able to destroy, and which probably no one before has ever felt with such appalling clarity. He has often struck me as inexorably indifferent, in the depths of his heart, to human beings—he is so much higher and more powerful than they are that he regards them as gnats, and their preoccupations as ridiculous and pitiful. He has retreated from them too far into some desert, where, with the utmost concentration of all

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\* Under this title Gorky is thinking back to two articles by Lev Tolstoi: "On the Social Movement in Russia" and "Appeal to the Russians: the Government, Revolutionaries and the People", which were confused in his memory.—*Ed.*

the forces of his spirit, he regards in solitude the "most important of all"—death.

All his life he has dreaded and hated death, all his life he has been haunted by the spectre of the Arzamas famine—must he, Tolstoi, die? The eyes of the whole world, the universe, are upon him. Living, quivering threads extend to him from China, India, America; his soul is for all men and all times. Why should not nature make an exception from her rules and bestow upon him—alone among men—physical immortality? Of course he is much too reasonable and intelligent to believe in miracles, and yet, on the other hand, he is a rebel, an explorer, he is like a young recruit, wild with fear and despair at the thought of the unknown barracks. I remember once at Gaspra, after his recovery, having read Lev Shestov's *Good and Evil in the Teachings of Nietzsche and Count Tolstoi*, he said, in reply to A.P. Chekhov's remark that he "did not like the book":

"And I found it amusing. Affectedly written, but it's not bad, it's interesting. You know I like cynics if they are sincere. He says somewhere: 'Truth is not required,' and he is quite right—what is truth to him? He'll die anyhow."

And, evidently noticing that his words had not been understood, he added, chuckling gleefully:

"Once a man has learned to think, all his thoughts are bound up with the thought of his own death. All philosophers are like that. And what's the good of truths, since death is sure to come?"

Further he proceeded to explain that truth is the same for all—love of God, but he spoke indifferently and wearily on the subject. On the verandah after lunch he picked up the book again, and finding the place where the author says: "Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche could not live without an answer to their questions, and any answer would be better for them than none," he laughed, saying:

"What a daring barber, he says straight out that I deceive myself, which means I deceive others, too. This is the obvious conclusion...."

Suler asked: "But why 'barber'?"

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "it just came into my mind that he was a fashionable dandy, and I remembered a barber from Moscow at the wedding of his peasant uncle in the village. Marvellous manners, can dance the lancers, and therefore despises everyone."

I give this conversation almost word for word. I remember very distinctly. I even jotted it down. I did something to

struck me. Suler and I made many notes, but Suler lost his on the way to Arzamas, where he visited me—he was very careless, and though he loved Lev Nikolayevich with an almost feminine love, his attitude to him was a little strange, almost condescending. I too put my notes away somewhere and can't find them, they must be in Russia. I observed Tolstoi very closely, for I have always sought, and shall seek to the day of my death, for a man of real, living faith. And also because A.P. Chekhov, speaking of our lack of culture, once complained:

“Look, every word Goethe said was written down, but Tolstoi's voice goes unrecorded. That's dreadfully Russian, old boy! Afterwards people will wake up, and start writing reminiscences full of distortions.”

But to proceed—on the subject of Shestov:

“‘One can't live,’ he says, ‘always gazing at terrible visions’—how does he know what one can do and what one can't? If he knew, if he saw visions, he wouldn't write trivialities, he would occupy himself with something serious, as Buddha did all his life....”

Someone remarked that Shestov was a Jew.

“Hardly! ” said L.N. incredulously. “He's not a bit like a Jew. There aren't any atheist Jews—name a single one. There aren't any.”

Sometimes it seems as if this old wizard is playing with death, flirting with it, trying to get the better of it somehow: I'm not afraid of you, I love you, I am waiting for you. And all the time his small, keen eyes are peering about—what are you like? And what is there behind you? Do you mean to destroy me altogether, or will something be left of me?

His words: “I'm happy, awfully happy, too happy! ” leave a strange impression. And—immediately afterwards: “Oh, to suffer! ” To suffer—that, too, is sincere in him. I do not for a moment doubt that, while he is sick, he would be sincerely glad to find himself in prison, in exile, in a word to accept the martyr's crown. Is it that he feels as if martyrdom would somehow justify death, would make it more comprehensible, easier to accept—from the external, formal point of view? I'm sure he has never been happy—neither in the “books of wisdom”, nor “on the back of a horse”, nor “in the arms of a woman”, has he enjoyed to the full the bliss of “the earthly paradise”. He is too rationally-minded for that, and knows life and people too well. Some more words of his:

“Caliph Abd-er-Rahman had fourteen happy days in his life, and I don't suppose I ever had so many. And all because I have

never lived—I don't know how to live—for myself, for my soul, but have always lived for effect, for others."

As we were leaving, Chekhov said: "I don't believe he has never been happy." I do. He hasn't. But it's not true that he lived "for effect". He always gave to others, as to beggars, of his surplus. He was fond of making them "do" things—read, walk, live on vegetables, love the muzhik and believe in the infallibility of the rational and religious ideas of Lev Tolstoi. You've got to give people something which either satisfies or occupies them, in order to get rid of them. Why couldn't they leave a man alone, in his habitual, torturing, but sometimes cosy solitude, facing the bottomless swamp—the question of "the great thing".

All Russian preachers, with the exception of Avvakum and, possibly, Tikhon Zadonsky, have been frigid people, not possessing an active, lively faith. In *The Lower Depths* I tried to create that sort of old man—Luka. It was "all sorts of answers", and not people, that interested him. He could not help coming up against people, he consoled them, but only so that they should not get in his way. And the whole philosophy, the whole preaching of such individuals, amounts to alms given away by them with concealed disgust, and beneath their preaching can be heard words which are plaintive and beggarly:

"Leave me alone! Love God and your neighbour, but leave me alone! Curse God, love those far removed, but leave me alone! Leave me alone, for I am but a man, and ... doomed to die."

Alas, life is, and long will be, like this! It could not be and never can be otherwise, for human beings are harassed, tortured, terribly isolated, and all shackled by a loneliness which saps at their souls. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if L.N. were to be reconciled to the church. There would be a logic of its own in this—all men are equally insignificant, even bishops. As a matter of fact, this would not be reconciliation, for him personally this act would merely be a logical step: "I forgive those who hate me." A Christian deed, and beneath it a light, keen mockery, it might be understood as a wise man's revenge on fools.

But I am not writing the way I wanted to, nor about the things I wanted to. There's a dog howling in my soul, and disaster flickers before my eyes. The papers have just come and I can see how it will be. A myth is being created in your part of the world, "once upon a time there were idlers and drones, and they brought forth—a saint". Only think what harm this will do to our country, and at a time when the folk are hanging their

heads in disillusion, and the souls of the majority are void and barren, and those of the elect are filled with melancholy. All these hungry, ravaged souls are clamouring for a myth. People are so longing to relieve themselves of pain, to assuage their tortures. And it is just the myth he wished for, and just what is so undesirable—the life of a holy man, a saint—whereas the greatness and sanctity of him is that he is a *man*, a man of maddening, torturing beauty, a man in the true sense of the word. I seem to be contradicting myself here, but never mind. He is a man seeking God not for himself, but for others, so that he, a man, may be left in peace in the desert he has chosen. He has given us the New Testament, and, to make us forget the conflicts within Christ himself, he has simplified His image, smoothed down the aggressive elements in Him and substituted for them “obedience to the will of Him who has sent me”. There is no gainsaying that Tolstoi’s New Testament is much more acceptable, it suits the “ailments” of the Russian people better. Something had to be given to these people, for they complain, their groans shake the earth and distract mankind from the “great thing”. And *War and Peace* and everything in that line do nothing to assuage the grief and despair of the mournful Russian land.

Of *War and Peace* he said himself: “Setting aside false modesty, it is another *Iliad*.” M.I. Tchaikovsky heard from Tolstoi’s own lips much the same appraisal of his *Childhood* and *Boyhood*.

Some journalists have just been from Naples—one even rushed over from Rome. They ask me to tell them what I think of Tolstoi’s “flight”—that’s what they call it—“flight”. I refused to speak to them. You understand, of course, that my soul is in a terrific turmoil—I don’t want to see Tolstoi turned into a saint. Let him remain a sinner, close to the heart of the sinful world, forever close to the heart of each of us. Pushkin and he—there is nothing greater and dearer to us....

Lev Tolstoi is dead.

A telegram has come, where it says in commonplace words—he is dead.

It was a blow at the heart, I wept from pain and grief, and now, in a kind of half-crazed state, I picture him, as I knew him, as I saw him, I feel an anguished desire to talk about him. I picture him in his coffin, lying there like a smooth stone on the bed of a stream, no doubt with his deceptive smile—so utterly detached—quietly hidden away in his grey beard. And his hands at last quietly folded—they have completed their arduous task.



I remember his keen eyes—they saw through everything—and his fingers, which always seemed to be modelling something in the air, his talk, his jests, his beloved peasant words, and that strangely indefinite voice of his. And I see how much of life that man embraced, how superhumanly wise he was—how eerie.

I saw him once as probably no one else ever saw him. I was walking along the seashore to Gaspra and suddenly, just outside the Yusupov estate, among the rocks, caught sight of his small, angular figure, clad in a crumpled grey suit and crushed hat. He sat there, his chin resting on his hands, the grey hairs of his beard straggling from between his fingers, gazing out to sea, while at his feet the greenish wavelets rolled submissively and affectionately, as if telling their story to the old wizard. It was a day of glancing light, the shadows of clouds crept over the rocks, so that the old man and the rocks were alternately lit up, and in shadow. The rocks, huge, with deep clefts in them, were covered with pungent smelling seaweed—there had been heavy breakers the day before. And he seemed to me like an ancient rock suddenly come to life, knowing the beginning and purpose of all things, and wondering when and what would be the end of stones and grass on the earth, of water in the ocean, and of man and the whole world, from rocks to the sun. The sea was like a part of his soul, and all around emanated from him, was part of him. Plunged in brooding immobility, the old man suggested something prophetic, enchanted, profound, in the gloom beneath him, disappearing in quest of something into the heights of the blue void above the earth, as if it were he—the concentration of his will—who was summoning and dismissing the waves, guiding the movements of the clouds and shadows which seemed to be shifting the rocks, waking them. And suddenly I felt, in a moment of madness, that he was going to rise, to wave his hand, and the sea would become motionless, glassy, the rocks would move and cry out, and all around would come to life, everything would find its voice, speak in multitudinous tongues of itself, of him, against him. It is impossible to put into words what I felt at that moment—there was ecstasy and horror in my soul, and then all was fused in the blissful thought:

“I am not an orphan in this world so long as this man inhabits it.”

Then, carefully, so as not to rattle the pebbles underfoot, I turned back, unwilling to disturb his meditations. And now—I do feel that I am an orphan, my tears fall as I write—never before have I wept so disconsolately, so hopelessly, so bitterly. I

don't even know if I loved him, but what does it matter whether it was love or hate that I felt for him? He always stirred emotions in my soul, vast, fantastic agitation. Even the disagreeable or hostile feelings that he aroused would assume forms that did not oppress but seemed to explode within one's soul, expanding it, making it more sensitive, giving it greater capacity. He was very imposing when, with an imperious shuffle, as if treading out the unevenness of the ground with the soles of his feet, he would suddenly appear from behind a door, or round a corner, advancing upon one with the short, light, rapid steps of a man accustomed to moving constantly over the surface of the world, his thumbs thrust into his belt, halting for a second and casting a searching glance around him, which took in everything new and immediately absorbed its significance.

"How d'you do! "

I always interpreted these words as follows: "How d'you do—I know there's not much pleasure for me or sense for you in it, but, just the same: How d'you do! "

In he came—a little man. And instantly everyone seemed to be smaller than he was. His peasant's beard, his rough but extraordinary hands, his simple clothes, all this external cosy democratic look of his, deceived many people, and very often some simple Russian soul, accustomed to greet a man according to his clothes—an ancient servile habit—would let himself go in a fragrant gushing stream of "spontaneity", which might be more exactly designated "familiarity".

"Oh, you dear man! So this is you! At last I can look my fill on the greatest son of my native earth! Greetings, greetings, accept my obeisance! "

That is the Moscow-Russian way, simple and cordial, but there is yet another Russian style—the "free-thinking" style:

"Lev Nikolayevich! Disagreeing with your religious and philosophical views, but profoundly respecting in your person a great artist..."

And suddenly from beneath the peasant beard, the crumpled democratic smock, would emerge the old Russian gentleman, the splendid aristocrat—and the "simple" ones, the educated ones, and the rest, would turn blue from the searing chill. It was a pleasure to see this pure-blooded individual, to note the nobility and grace of his gestures, the proud reserve of his speech, to listen to the exquisite precision of his devastating words. There was just enough of the fine gentleman in him to deal with serfs. And when they summoned into being the grand seigneur in Tolstoi, he appeared before them with easy

lightness, crushing them so that they could only cringe and squeal.

I once travelled with one of these "simple" Russians from Yasnaya Polyana to Moscow; it took him a long time to recover his balance, and he kept repeating distractedly with a piteous smile:

"My, what a trouncing! Wasn't he fierce, my word!"

And then he exclaimed ruefully:

"Why, I thought he really was an anarchist. Everybody keeps calling him an anarchist, and I believed them...."

He was a wealthy man, a great industrialist, he had a big belly and a fat face the colour of raw meat—why should he have wanted Tolstoi to be an anarchist? This remains one of the "profound secrets" of the Russian soul.

When L.N. wished to please he could do this more easily than a beautiful, intelligent woman. He is seated in the midst of a varied circle—Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, the house painter Ilya, a Social-Democrat from Yalta, the Stundist Patsuk, a musician, Countess Kleinmichel's bailiff, the poet Bulgakov—all gazing at him with enamoured eyes. He is expounding to them the philosophy of Lao-tse, and he appears to me like a wonderful one-man orchestra, endowed with the ability to play on several instruments simultaneously—a trumpet, a drum, an accordion, and a flute. I, too, gazed at him. And now I long to gaze at him once more—and I shall never see him again.

Reporters have been here, they say a telegram was received in Rome, refuting the rumour of the death of Lev Tolstoi. They made a great fuss and chatter, glibly expressing their sympathy for Russia. The Russian papers leave no room for doubt.

It was impossible to lie to him—even from pity. He might be dangerously ill without arousing pity. It is fatuous to pity people like him. They must be looked after and cherished, the dust of worn-out, callous words must not be sprinkled on them.

"You don't like me, do you?" he asked. And the answer had to be: "No, I don't."

"You don't love me, do you?" "No, I don't love you today."

He was ruthless in his questions, reserved in his replies as befits a sage.

He spoke marvellously about the past, and best of all about Turgenev. Fet, he always mentioned with a good-humoured chuckle, always remembered something comic about him; of Nekrasov he spoke coldly, sceptically, but he spoke about writers in general as if they were his children, and he a father

who knew all their shortcomings, but was defiantly determined to make more of the bad in them than of the good. And whenever he spoke derogatorily about anyone I always felt as if he were bestowing alms upon his hearers; it was disconcerting to listen to his criticisms, one lowered one's eyes involuntarily beneath his keen smile—and nothing remained in one's memory.

Once he argued vehemently that G.I. Uspensky wrote in a Tula dialect and had no talent. And yet he said to A.P. Chekhov in my presence:

"There's a writer for you! By the force of his sincerity he reminds one of Dostoyevsky, but Dostoyevsky was given to dabbling in politics and striking poses—Uspensky is much more simple and sincere. If he believed in God, he would be sure to be some sort of a dissenter."

"But you said he was a Tula writer and had no talent."

His eyes disappeared beneath his shaggy brows, and he said:

"He wrote badly. D'you call that language? More punctuation marks than words. Talent is love. He who loves is talented. Just look at lovers—they're all talented."

He spoke about Dostoyevsky with evident reluctance, stiffly, evasively, as though trying to overcome something.

"He ought to have studied the doctrines of Confucius or the Buddhists, they would have calmed him. That is the great thing, which everyone ought to know. He was a violently sensual man—when he got angry, bumps appeared on his bald spot and his ears twitched. He felt much, but did not know how to think, he learned to think from the Fourierists, from Butashevich and that lot. And then he hated them all his life. There was something Jewish in his blood. He was mistrustful, vain, cantankerous and miserable. It's a funny thing that so many people read him—I can't understand why. After all it's difficult and futile—all those Idiots, Hobbledehoyes, Raskolnikovs and the rest, weren't a bit like that, everything was much simpler and more comprehensible really. Leskov, now, why don't people read him? He's a real writer—have you read him?"

"Oh, yes! I love him, especially his language!"

"He knew the language marvellously, he could do anything with it. Funny you should like him, there's something un-Russian about you, your thoughts are not Russian thoughts—you don't mind my saying that, you're not hurt? I'm an old man, and perhaps I'm no longer capable of understanding modern literature, but it always seems to me that it is in some way un-Russian. People are writing a peculiar sort of verses—I don't know what these verses are for, who they are for. We

must learn to write poetry from Pushkin, Tyutchev, Shenshin (Fet.—*Tr.*). You, now—" he turned to Chekhov—"you're Russian. Yes, you're very, very Russian."

And he put his arm round Chekhov's shoulders with an affectionate smile, much to the embarrassment of Chekhov, who began talking about his house and the Tatars in a bass voice.

He loved Chekhov, and when he looked at him, his glance, almost tender at that moment, seemed to be caressing Chekhov's face. One day Chekhov was walking along one of the paths in the park with Alexandra Lvovna\*, and Tolstoi, who was at that time still and invalid, sat in an armchair on the verandah, and seemed to go out towards Chekhov with his whole being.

"What a charming, fine man! Modest, quiet, just like a young woman. He even walks like a girl. He's simply wonderful!" he said in a low voice.

One evening, in the twilight, frowning, his eyebrows twitching, he read us a version of the scene from *Father Sergius* in which the woman goes to the hermit to seduce him; he read it right through, raised his head, closed his eyes and said distinctly:

"The old man wrote it well—very well!"

It was said with such exquisite simplicity, the admiration of the beauty of his own writing was so sincere that I shall never forget the rapture I felt then—a rapture I never could put into words, and which it cost me an enormous effort to conceal. My very heart seemed to stand still, and the next moment everything seemed revivifying, fresh, new.

The inexpressible, individual charm of his speech, so incorrect on the surface, with such incessant repetitions of certain words, so saturated with a peasant-like simplicity, could only be understood by those who watched him talk. The force of his words lay not only in his intonations and in the liveliness of his features, but in the play and gleam of his eyes, the most eloquent eyes I have ever seen. L.N. had a thousand eyes in one pair.

Suler, Chekhov, Sergei Lvovich and someone else were sitting in the park talking about women; he listened to them in silence for a long time and then said suddenly:

"I shall tell the truth about women when I have one foot in the grave. Then I'll jump into my coffin and hide under the

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\* Tolstoi's daughter.—*Tr.*

lid—try and catch me then!” And his eyes gleamed so defiantly and terrifyingly that nobody spoke for a few moments.

The way I see it he combined in himself the audacity of Vassily Buslayev and something of the stubborn soul of Father Avvakum, while above all this, or beside it, there hid the scepticism of Chaadayev. The Avvakum element preached, torturing the artist’s soul, the Novgorod rogue in him made him denounce Dante and Shakespeare, while the Chaadayev element chuckled over these amusements—and tortures—of the soul.

It was the traditional Russian in him that made him denounce science and the state principle—the Russian driven to passive anarchism by the futility of the innumerable attempts at building life on humane lines.

Here is a remarkable thing: by the force of some mysterious intuition, Olaf Gulbransson, the cartoonist of *Simplicissimus*, discovered the Buslayev feature in Tolstoi. Look at the drawing attentively, and you’ll see what likeness there is to the real Lev Tolstoi, what an audacious mind looks at you from that face with the deep-set eyes, the mind of one for whom nothing is sacred, who has no superstitions or idle beliefs.

There he stands before me, this wizard, alien to everyone, travelling alone over those deserts of thought in which he sought in vain for the all-embracing truth. I gaze at him, and though the pain of the loss is great, pride in having seen that man softens my pain and grief.

It was strange to see L. N. amongst the “Tolstoians”; he stands in their midst like some majestic belfry, and his bell tolls out ceaselessly to the whole world, while all around him scamper small, stealthy curs, yelping to the tones of the bell, and eyeing one another mistrustfully, as if to see which of them was yapping best. I always felt that these people filled both the house at Yasnaya Polyana and the mansion of Countess Panina with the spirit of hypocrisy, cowardice, bargaining, and the expectation of legacies. There is something in common between the “Tolstoians” and those pilgrims who traverse Russia from end to end, carrying the bones of dogs which they give out to be fragments of holy relics, and trading in “Egyptian darkness” and the “tears” of the Mother of God. I remember one of these apostles refusing an egg at Yasnaya Polyana out of sympathy for the hen, but devouring meat with relish in the station buffet at Tula, and saying:

“The old chap exaggerates!”

They are almost all given to sighing and kissing, they all have sweaty, boneless hands and deceitful eyes. At the same

time these are practical folk, who manage their worldly affairs very skilfully.

L.N., of course, appraised the "Tolstoians" at their true value, and so did Sulerzhitsky, whom he loved tenderly, always speaking of him with youthful fervour and admiration. One day a certain individual related eloquently at Yasnaya Polyana how easy his life had become, and how pure his soul, since adopting the doctrines of Tolstoi. L.N. bent towards me and said softly:

"He's lying, the rascal, but he's doing it to give me pleasure."

There were many who tried to give him pleasure, but I never saw anyone do it really well. He very seldom spoke to me about his customary subjects—universal forgiveness, love for one's neighbour, the New Testament and Buddhism—having evidently realised from the very start that all this was "not for the likes of me". I deeply appreciated this.

He could be most charmingly tactful, sympathetic and gentle when he liked, and then his speech would be of an enchanting simplicity and grace, but sometimes it was quite disagreeable to listen to him. I never liked the way he talked about women—in this respect he spoke too much like "the common man", and something unnatural sounded through his words, something insincere, and, at the same time, extremely personal. It was as if he had once been hurt by someone, and could neither forget nor forgive the injury. On the evening of my first acquaintance with him he took me into his study—it was at Khamovniki—seated me before him, and began talking about *Varenka Olesova* and *Twenty-Six Men and One Girl*. I was depressed by his tone, quite disconcerted, so crudely and harshly did he endeavour to convince me that shame is not natural to a healthy young girl.

"If a girl has passed her fifteenth birthday and is healthy, she wants someone to kiss her and pull her about. Her mind recoils from that which it neither knows nor understands, and that's what people call chastity and shame. But her flesh already knows that the incomprehensible is inevitable, legitimate, already demands the fulfilment of this law, despite her mind. Your Varenka Olesova is described as healthy, but her feelings are those of an anaemic creature—that's all wrong!"

He then began to speak of the girl in *Twenty-Six*, uttering one obscenity after another with a simplicity which I found brutal and which even offended me. Afterwards I realised that he only used these "forbidden" words because he found them the most precise and pointed, but at the time his way of

speaking was disagreeable to me. I did not contradict him—suddenly he became kind and considerate, asking me about my life, my studies, my reading.

“Are you really as well-read as they say? Is Korolenko a musician?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t know.”

“Don’t you? Do you like his stories?”

“Very much.”

“That’s because of the contrast. He’s a poet, and there’s nothing of the poet about you. Have you read Waltmann?”

“Yes.”

“A good writer, isn’t he? Bright, exact, never exaggerates. Sometimes he’s better than Gogol. He knew Balzac. Gogol imitated Marlinsky, you know.”

When I said that Gogol had probably been influenced by Hoffmann, Sterne, and possibly Dickens, he shot a glance at me, and asked:

“Where did you read that? You didn’t? It’s not true. I don’t suppose Gogol read Dickens. But you really have read a lot—take care—that’s dangerous. Koltsov ruined himself that way.”

When he saw me off he put his arms round me and kissed me, saying:

“You’re a real muzhik! You’ll have a hard time amongst the writers, but don’t let anything scare you, always say what you think, never mind if it’s rude sometimes. Clever people will understand.”

This first meeting created a dual impression on me—I was both happy and proud to have met Tolstoi, but his talk had been rather like a cross-examination, and I felt as if I had seen not the author of *The Cossacks*, *Kholstomer*, *War and Peace*, but a gentleman who had condescended to me and considered it necessary to speak to me in a kind of “popular” manner, using the language of the streets, and this had upset my idea of him—an idea to which I had become accustomed, and which was dear to me.

The next time I saw him was at Yasnaya. It was a dull day in autumn, with a fine drizzle, and he put on a heavy overcoat and high leather boots, regular waders, and took me for a walk in a birch copse. He jumped ditches and puddles with youthful alacrity, shaking the raindrops from the branches on to his head, all the time giving me a brilliant account of how Shenshin had explained Schopenhauer to him in this very copse. And he stroked the damp, silky trunks of the birch-trees lovingly.



"I read some verses lately:

Mushrooms are over, but how strong

The mushroom smell still in the moisty hollows....

—that's good, very well observed."

Suddenly a hare started right under our feet. Tolstoi jumped up, wildly excited. His cheeks turned scarlet, and he came out with a loud "tally-ho!" Then he looked at me with an indescribable smile and gave a wise, very human laugh. He was admirable at that moment.

Another time, in the park, he looked up at a hawk, soaring over the farmyard, circling it, and then poising motionless in the sky, its wings moving faintly, as if uncertain whether to swoop now, or wait a bit. L.N. was on the alert at once, covering his eyes with the palm of his hand and whispering nervously:

"The rascal is after our chickens! Look, look—now—oh, he's afraid! Perhaps the coachman is there—we must call the coachman...."

And he did. When he shouted, the hawk took fright and flew away.

L.N. sighed and said with evident self-reproach:

"I shouldn't have shouted—he would have gone away anyhow...."

Once, when speaking to him about Tiflis, I mentioned V.V. Flerovsky-Bervi.

"Did you know him?" asked L.N. eagerly. "Tell me something about him."

I began telling him that Flerovsky was tall, with a long beard, thin, big-eyed, wore a long sailcloth robe, with a little bag of rice boiled in red wine hanging from his belt, and went about with a huge canvas umbrella; that he had roved with me the mountain paths of the Transcaucasus, where once, in a narrow path, we encountered a bull from which we escaped by threatening the surly beast with the open umbrella, backing all the time at the risk of falling into the abyss. Suddenly I noticed tears in the eyes of L.N., and broke off in embarrassment.

"Never mind, go on, go on! It's only the pleasure of hearing about a good man! What an interesting man he must be! That's just how I imagined him—not like other people! He is the most mature, the wisest of all the radical writers, he shows very ably in his *ABC* that the whole of our civilisation is barbarous, while culture is the affair of peaceful tribes, the affair of the weak, not of the strong, and the struggle for existence is a lie invented to justify evil. You don't agree with this, no doubt. But Daudet does, remember his Paul Astier."

"How is one to reconcile Flerovsky's theory with the role of the Normans in the history of Europe, for instance? "

"Oh, the Normans! That's different."

If he had no answer ready, he would say: "That's different."

I always felt, and I do not think I was mistaken, that L.N. did not like talking about literature, but was intensely interested in the personality of the writer. I very often heard his questions: "Do you know him? What's he like? Where was he born?" And his views nearly always displayed the individual from a very special point of view.

Of V. G. Korolenko he said thoughtfully:

"He's a Ukrainian, and so he should be able to see our life better and more clearly than we see it ourselves."

Of Chekhov, whom he loved so tenderly:

"His profession spoilt him. If he hadn't been a doctor he would have written still better."

Of one of the younger writers he said:

"He plays at being an Englishman, and Moscow people are no good at that."

He told me more than once:

"You're a romancer. All your Kuvaldas and the rest are pure inventions."

I remarked that Kuvalda had been taken from life.

"Tell me where you met him."

He was greatly amused by the scene in the office of Kolontayev, the Kazan Justice of the Peace, where I first saw the man I described under the name of Kuvalda.

"Blue blood! Blue blood—that's it!" he said, laughing and wiping his eyes. "But what a charming, amusing fellow! You tell stories better than you write. You're a romantic, you know—an inventor, you might as well admit it."

I said that probably all writers invented to a certain extent, showing people as they would have liked them to be in real life. I said, too, that I liked active people, who aspired to oppose the evil in life with all their powers, even with violence.

"But violence itself is the chief evil!" he cried, taking my arm. "How are you going to get away from that, Scribe? *My Fellow-Traveller*, now—that's no invention, it's good, because not invented. It's when you start thinking that all your people come out as knights, Amadis and Siegfrieds...."

I remarked that so long as we go on living completely surrounded by inevitable ape-like "fellow-travellers", everything built by us will be built on sand, in a hostile environment.

He chuckled, nudging me gently with his elbow.

"Very, very dangerous conclusions might be drawn from this. You're no true socialist. You're a romantic, and romantics ought to be monarchists, as they always have been."

"What about Victor Hugo?"

"Victor Hugo's different. I don't like him, he's a noisy fellow."

He often asked me what I was reading, and invariably scolded me for what he considered my bad choice of books.

"Gibbon's worse than Kostomarov, you should read Momm-sen—he's a great bore, but he's very solid."

When he discovered that the first book I ever read was *Les Frères Zemganno*, he waxed quite indignant.

"There you are—a foolish novel! That's what spoilt you. There are three French writers—Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert—you may add Maupassant, but Chekhov's better. The Goncourts are mere clowns, they only pretend to be serious. They learned life from books written by inventors like themselves and they took it all seriously, but nobody needs their writing."

I did not agree with him, and this rather irritated L.N. He could not stand contradiction, and his arguments were sometimes strangely wilful.

"There's no such thing as degeneracy," he said. "It's all an invention of the Italian Lombroso, and the Jew Nordau echoed him like a parrot. Italy is a country of charlatans and adventurers—only people like Aretinos, Casanovas, Cagliostros are born there."

"What about Garibaldi?"

"That's politics, that's different."

When presented with one fact after another from the history of merchant families in Russia, he replied:

"It's not true, it all comes out of clever books...."

I told him the story of three generations in a merchant family known to me—a story in which degeneracy acted with particular ruthlessness. Plucking at my sleeve in his agitation, he declared:

"That's true! That I know—there are two such families in Tula. That's what you ought to write about. A big novel in brief—d'you see what I mean? That's the way to do it!"

And his eyes gleamed avidly.

"But some of them will be knights, L.N."

"None of that! This is very serious. The one who becomes a monk to pray for the whole family—that's marvellous. That's

real life. You sin, and I'll go and redeem your sins. And the other—the bored grabber—that's true, too. And for him to drink and be a beast and a debauchee, and love everyone, and suddenly commit a murder—how good that is! That's what you ought to write about instead of searching for a hero among thieves and tramps. Heroes are lies, inventions, there's nothing but human beings, people—that's all! ”

He often pointed out to me exaggerations which had crept into my stories, but once, speaking of the second part of *Dead Souls*, he said, smiling good-naturedly:

“We're all the most arrant romancers. I am, too. Sometimes one gets writing and all of a sudden one feels sorry for some character and starts giving him better attributes, or tones down another so that the first shall not seem too black in comparison.”

And instantly, in the severe tones of an inexorable judge:

“And that's why I say art is lies, deceit, arbitrary stuff, harmful to humanity. You don't write about real life as it is, but about your own ideas of life, what you yourself think about life. What good will it do anyone to know how I see that tower, or the sea, or that Tatar? Who wants to know that, what's the use of it? ”

Sometimes his thoughts and feelings seemed to me mere whims, and even purposely distorted, but more often he would strike and subdue his listeners by the austere directness of his thoughts, like Job, the fearless interrogator of the cruel God.

He once said:

“I was walking along the Kiev highroad in the end of May; the earth was paradise, everything rejoiced, the sky was cloudless, the birds sang, the bees hummed, the sun was kindly, and everything round me was festive, human, splendid. I was touched to tears and felt as if I were myself a bee roaming over the loveliest flowers in the world, and as if God were close to my soul. Suddenly what did I see? At the edge of the road, under some bushes, lay two pilgrims, a man and a woman, swarming over each other, both drab, filthy, old, wriggling like worms, mumbling and muttering, the sun mercilessly lighting up their bare, discoloured feet and decrepit bodies. I felt a pang at my heart. Oh, God, the creator of beauty—aren't you ashamed of yourself? I felt very bad....

“So you see the sort of things that happen! Nature—the Bogomiles\* considered her the creation of Satan—torments man

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\* A religious sect in Bulgaria.—Tr.

too harshly and mockingly, she takes away his strength, but leaves him his desires. This is true for all who have living souls. To man alone has it been given to feel the shame and horror of this torture—in the flesh bestowed upon him. We bear this within us like some inevitable punishment, and—for what sin? ”

While speaking, the expression of his eyes changed in a very peculiar manner, sometimes becoming childishly plaintive, sometimes showing a harsh, dry gleam. His lips twitched and his moustache bristled. When he had finished speaking he took a handkerchief from the pocket of his smock and rubbed his face hard, although it was quite dry. Then he passed the hook-like fingers of his strong peasant hand through his beard and repeated softly:

“Yes, for what sin? ”

I was walking along the lower road from Dyulber to Ai-Todor with him one day. Striding lightly, like a young man, he said, displaying more agitation than was usual with him:

“The flesh should be a well-trained dog to the soul, going wherever the soul sends it. And look at us! The flesh is riotous and unresting, and the soul follows it in pitiable helplessness.”

He rubbed his chest violently, just over his heart, raised his brows, and continued musingly:

“In Moscow, near the Sukharev Tower, I once saw—it was in autumn—a drunken wench. She lay there in the gutter. A stream of filthy water trickled out of a yard, right under her neck and back, and there she lay in the cold water, muttering, tossing, wriggling about in the wet, unable to get up.”

He shuddered, closed his eyes for a moment, shook his head and went on in low tones:

“Let’s sit down here. There’s nothing more horrible, more loathsome than a drunken female. I wanted to go and help her get up but I could not, I shrank from it. She was all slimy and wet, after touching her you wouldn’t be able to get your hands clean for a month—ghastly! And on the kerbstone near by sat a little grey-eyed, fair-haired boy, tears running down his cheeks, sniffing, and bawling helplessly:

“Ma-ma-a-a.... Get up....”

“Every now and then she moved her arms, snorted, raised her head, and again—down it went into the dirt.”

He fell silent and then, looking round him, repeated uneasily almost in a whisper:

“Ghastly, ghastly! Have you seen many drunken women? You have—oh, God! Don’t write about it, you mustn’t.”

"Why not? "

Looking into my eyes and smiling, he echoed:

"Why not? "

Then he said, thoughtfully and slowly:

"I don't know. It's just that I—it seems shameful to write about beastliness. But after all—why not? One should write about everything...."

Tears stood in his eyes. He wiped them away and, smiling all the time, looked at his handkerchief, while the tears trickled down his wrinkles again.

"I'm crying," he said. "I'm an old man, it makes my heart throb when I think of anything horrible."

And then, nudging me gently:

"You, too, will have lived your life, and everything will remain unaltered, and you will weep even more bitterly than I am weeping now, more 'drippily', as peasant women say.... But everything must be written about, everything, or the little fair-haired boy will be hurt, he will reproach you—that's not the truth, he will say—not the whole truth."

He gave himself a thorough shake and said coaxingly:

"Come now, tell me something, you're a very good talker. Something about a child, about yourself. It's hard to believe you too were once a child, you're—such an odd chap. You seem to have been born grown-up. There's much that is childish, immature in your thoughts, and yet you know quite a lot about life—you don't need to know any more. Come, tell me something...."

And he settled himself comfortably on the exposed roots of a pine-tree, watching the fuss and movement of ants in the grey pine needles.

Here, in the southern landscape, so strangely varied to the eye of a northerner, amidst all this luxurious, shamelessly voluptuous plant-life, sits Lev Tolstoi, his very name expressive of his inner force! \*—a small man as gnarled and knotty as if he were made of rugged, profoundly earthy roots. In the garish landscape of the Crimea, I repeat, he seemed to be at once in his right place, and out of place. A very ancient man, the master of the whole countryside, as it were—the master and maker, who after an absence of a hundred years is back in an estate which he himself has laid out. There is much that he has forgotten, and much that is new to him; things are as they should be, but not quite, and he must find out at once what is not as it should be and why.

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\* *Lev* means "lion" in Russian.—*Tr.*

He would walk up and down the paths and roads with the rapid, hurried gait of an experienced globe-trotter, his keen eyes, from which not a stone, not a thought could escape, gazing, measuring, testing, comparing. And he scattered around him the living seed of his incessant thought. He said to Suler:

"You never read, Suler, and that's too bad, it's conceited, and Gorky here reads a great deal, and that's wrong, too—it's lack of confidence in himself. I write a lot and that's not right because I do it from senile vanity, from the desire to make everyone think as I do. Of course my way of thinking is right for myself, though Gorky thinks it's wrong for him, and you don't think at all, you just blink and look round for something to catch hold of. And you catch hold of things which have nothing to do with you—you've often done that. You catch hold and cling, and when the thing you are clinging to begins to fall away from you, you let go of it. Chekhov has a very good story—*The Darling*—you're rather like the woman in it."

"In what way?" laughed Suler.

"You're always ready to love, but you don't know how to select, and you fritter away your energy on trifles."

"Isn't everyone like that?"

"Everyone?" echoed L.N. "No, no—not everyone."

And suddenly he lashed out at me:

"Why don't you believe in God?"

"I have no faith, L.N."

"That's not true. You're a believer by nature, you can't get on without God. You'll soon begin to feel that. You don't believe because you're obstinate, and because you're annoyed—the world isn't made the way you'd like it to be. Some people are unbelievers out of shyness. Young men are like that sometimes. They worship some woman, but can't bear to show it, they're afraid of being misunderstood, and besides they have no courage. Faith, like love, requires courage, daring. You must say to yourself: 'I believe', and everything will be all right, everything will appear as you would like it to be; everything will explain itself to you, attract you. There is much that you love, for instance, and faith is simply the intensification of love, you must love still more, and love will turn to faith. It is always the best woman in the world that men love, and each one loves the best woman in the world and there you are—that's faith. An unbeliever cannot love. He falls in love with one today, and another in a year's time. The soul of such men is a tramp, it is sterile, and that's not right. You were born a believer and it's no

use trying to go against your own nature. You are always saying—beauty. And what is beauty? The highest and most perfect is—God.”

He had hardly ever talked to me about these things before, and the importance of the subject, its unexpectedness, took me unawares and almost overcame me. I said nothing. Seated on the sofa, his feet pushed beneath it, he allowed a triumphant smile to steal over his beard and said, shaking a finger at me:

“You can’t get away from that by saying nothing, you know!”

And I, who do not believe in God, cast a stealthy, almost timid glance at him and said to myself:

“This man is like God.”





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